

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 2024/25: Reduce opening hours at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs)		Service Director: Jon Winstanley Author: Daniel Warne		8 February 2024 Version 1 (Scrutiny Commission)	
Proposal:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reduce the weekday (Monday to Friday) opening times, currently 9am to 6pm, of both HWRCs by two hours to 11am to 6pm To remove the late-night opening hours (6pm to 8pm - Thursdays only) during the summer months at Newtown Road 				
Total budget 2023/24:		Initial proposed saving 2024/25:	£59,000	Recommended saving 2024/25:	£59,00
No. of responses:	<p>In total, 190 responses were received. The breakdown of responses is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 158 – A user of the service 161 - A resident of West Berkshire 0 - A visitor to West Berkshire 8 - A West Berkshire business owner 11 - Employed by a West Berkshire business 7 - Employed by West Berkshire Council 9 - A Parish/Town Councillor 0 - A District Councillor 2 - A partner organisation 0 - A West Berkshire Council service provider 3 - Other <p>We received 0 petitions.</p>				
Key issues raised:	<p>The majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the proposals. There was some debate over what the best use of the opening hours would be, but most respondents seemed to agree that they could make the proposals work for them. Suggestions included opening from 9am - 4pm or 10am - 5pm instead. Concerns were</p>				

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	raised that we were making it harder for residents to visit the sites especially those who worked full time and thus could increase fly tipping.		
Equality issues:	No issues were raised during the consultation, that weren't already included in the EqIA stage one.		
Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Advertise and promote the changes.	We agree that this is an important component of reducing the impact from this change and will look to do so if the proposal is passed and implemented. An advantage of the booking system is that it will only allow customers to book appointments when the site is open, thus reducing and near removing any risk of people turning up to use the site when it is closed.	
	Open another site.	Unfortunately, this suggestion is not financially feasible. The investment and ongoing cost required to build and operate another recycling centre will outweigh a large majority of all of the proposals put forward for consultation.	
	Have a priority booking system.	We do not believe that this suggestion will reduce the impact of this change as there is capacity within the amount of appointment already available within the new proposed opening hours. A priority system may also negatively impact residents who do not qualify or afford.	
	Remove the booking system	Since the implementation of the booking system in 2020, queues on the A339 leading into Newbury have disappeared over weekends and busy periods where tailbacks of up to 800m where a frequent occurrence. It has also reduced the time it takes for residents to enter and exit site, as they no longer need to queue while on site. It has also allowed us to maintain a good level of customer service with complaints from residents considerably reducing as has abuse toward site operatives. We have also seen residents make better use of each visit, by making fewer visits but bringing more with them each time, which	

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		has a positive effect on vehicle movements and the environment. As such, we are not planning to remove the booking system.										
	Keep the late-night opening.	We have monitored utilisation of the late-night Thursday opening, which has shown that only 60% of appointments were booked over the past 12 months, we have also received a positive response to the consultation proposing to remove this.										
	Open 6 days a week.	This was an initial option discussed with before this proposal was put forward. It was decided that this would have a bigger impact on residents and site staff, without generating a significant increase in savings.										
	Open from 9-4 or 10-5 instead.	<p>This was an initial option discussed with before this proposal was put forward. We felt that 11am - 6pm was the better option as it still allows people who work during the daytime to visit in the evening, whereas opening 9am - 4pm or 10am - 5pm removes that opportunity. Data from our booking system show that appointments later in the day are better utilised when compared to those in the morning.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Newtown Road</th> <th>Padworth</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>9 - 11am</td> <td>63%</td> <td>46%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4 - 6pm</td> <td>72%</td> <td>54%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Newtown Road	Padworth	9 - 11am	63%	46%	4 - 6pm	72%	54%
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	Increase kerbside recycling.	We are always looking at options to increase kerbside recycling and have plans to increase the amount of plastic we collect from the kerbside in line with Simpler Recycling measures announced by the Government at the end of 2023.										
	Keep the booking system.	We plan to keep the booking system as queues on the A339 leading into Newbury have disappeared over weekends and busy periods where tail backs of up to 800m were a frequent occurrence. It has also reduced the time it takes for residents to enter and exit site, as they no longer need to queue while on site. It has also allowed us to maintain a good level of customer service with										

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		complaints from residents considerably reducing as has abuse toward site operatives. We have also seen residents make better use of each visit, by making fewer visits but bringing more with them each time, which has a positive effect on vehicle movements and the environment.	
	Get rid of the garden waste subscription charge.	The Council is currently assessing options for phasing out the garden waste charge over time.	
	Charge per booking slot.	We cannot charge residents of West Berkshire to use the HWRCs. We do charge non-residents a fee per visit, currently £7.77.	
	Renegotiate the Veolia contract.	Our current contract with Veolia, with which HWRCs falls, expires in 2032.	
	Redeployment of staff affected.	All staff employed at the HWRCs are employees of Veolia, the Council does not have control as to how the changes impact staff affected by this proposal, however we will work closely with Veolia to minimise any impact as much as possible.	
	Install more mini recycling centres.	We are always actively looking for appropriate sites within the district. We encourage landowners to come forward if they have any suitable land within the district that could be considered.	
	Improve efficiency of the site by better traffic management.	The sites operate a one-way system so cars can navigate through the sites safely and quickly. The booking slots are each 30 minutes long, but many cars pass through the site a lot quicker than this. We are not aware of any traffic management issues on site.	
	Have an unmanned part of the site open when closed for resident to drop items off.	This would incur additional cost to implement as changes would need to be made to the sites to facilitate this. We would also have to restrict types of waste available to drop off, like at the mini recycling centres, as we cannot accept all waste types without suitable trained staff on site. As such we do not see this as a feasible solution.	

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	Agreements with other councils to use their sites	This would come at a financial cost to the Council and as such will not generate any saving. We are in regular contact with our neighbouring authorities, there is currently no appetite for cross-border arrangements. We are fortunate to have 2 HWRCs within a short driving distance for most residents (Estimate of under 30 minutes for majority of residents).	
	Change nothing.	Savings need to be found for the Council to help us balance our books and to continue providing essential services.	
	Review the changes periodically	We will continue to monitor the availability of booking slots quarterly to see how this change impacts the service and users.	
	Reduce staffing levels	Staffing levels need to be at a certain level to ensure the health and safety of the site is not compromised.	

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Identified benefits or opportunities	Suggestion	Council response	
	Remove booking system	Since the implementation of the booking system in May 2020, queues on the A339 leading into Newbury have disappeared over weekends and busy periods where tail backs of up to 800m where a frequent occurrence. It has also reduced the time it takes for residents to enter and exit site, as they no longer need to queue while on site. It has also allowed us to maintain a good level of customer service with complaints from residents considerably reducing as has abuse toward site operatives. We have also seen residents make better use of each visit, by making fewer visits but bringing more with them each time, which has a positive effect on vehicle movements and the environment. As such we are not planning to remove the booking system.	
	Reduce hours even more	If implemented, we will review this proposal quarterly and monitor utilisation of slots to see if this is beneficial. However, we feel that this proposal offers the right balance in terms of availability and impact on residents and staff.	
Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Personnel and Management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce WBC management, staff, and overall expenses. 	The Council regularly undertakes reviews of staff structure and costs, to ensure that ratepayers are getting suitable value for money. Spending restrictions have been in place for several months.	
	Waste Management (HWRCs and Recycling): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce operating hours at HWRCs. Increase mini recycling centres. Eliminate the food waste service. Scrap the booking system. 	<p>If implemented, we will review this proposal quarterly over the next couple of years monitoring utilisation of slots to see if a further reduction in opening hours is beneficial. However, we feel that this proposal offers the right balance in terms of availability and impact on residents and staff.</p> <p>While we are open to increasing the number of mini recycling centres, doing so will increase costs, so is not a suitable alternative option to find savings.</p>	

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		<p>All Waste Collection Authorities will have to provide a weekly food waste service by 2026, as per The Environment Act 2021 section 57. So, we will not be removing it. It is also having a positive impact on the amount of waste we recycle.</p> <p>We do not believe that scrapping the HWRC booking is an alternative option for finding this saving.</p>	
	<p>Infrastructure and Utilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make road repairs last longer. • Turn off street lights. 	These suggestions have been noted and will be shared with relevant teams for consideration.	
	<p>Administrative Efficiency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less printing. • Review all discretionary spending. 	These suggestions have been noted and will be shared with relevant teams for consideration.	
	<p>Transportation and Planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop putting in unnecessary cycle lanes. • Discontinue discounted bus travel. 	These suggestions have been noted and will be shared with relevant teams for consideration.	
	<p>Financial Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become a unitary authority. 	We are already a unitary authority.	
	<p>Miscellaneous:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't sell off property. • Privatise services. 	Comments noted. These suggestions have been noted and will be shared with relevant teams for consideration.	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce spending on consultants. • Reduce grass cutting. • Discontinue security services at Four Houses Corner. 		
Suggestions for income generation:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Waste Management (HWRCs and Recycling): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce charges for HWRC slots and commercial waste. • Increase bulky waste charges. • Retain the garden waste charge. • Start a reuse shop. • Increase recycling. • Sell compost. 	<p>We cannot charge residents of West Berkshire to use the HWRCs. We do charge non-residents a fee per visit, currently £7.77.</p> <p>The feasibility of introducing commercial waste at our HWRCs is being investigated.</p> <p>We are always looking at options to increase kerbside recycling and have plans to increase the amount of plastic we collect from the kerbside in line with Simpler Recycling measures announced by the Government at the end of 2023.</p> <p>We have investigated selling compost, unfortunately it is not deemed feasible due to investment required (bagging machine, additional staff etc.) and the low market value of compost.</p> <p>We are looking into increasing charges for bulky waste collections, as we are aware we do not charge as much as many of our neighbouring councils.</p>	

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		<p>We could retain and increase the garden waste charge, this would be easily implemented and generate a significant amount of income to cover the financial shortfall if the instruction is given by decision makers. The Council is currently considering options for phasing out the garden waste charge over time.</p> <p>A reuse shop is being considered for the future, however it will require significant investment as well as a feasibility study into its viability.</p>	
	<p>General Income Generation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sell things. • Charge for HGVs in town. • Explore privatisation of certain services. • Use volunteers more effectively. 	<p>These suggestions have been noted and will be shared with relevant teams for consideration.</p>	
	<p>Financial Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Council Tax. • Sell unused property. 	<p>These suggestions have been noted and will be shared with relevant teams for consideration.</p>	
Officer conclusion and recommendation as a result of the responses:	<p>The predominant sentiment from respondents indicates substantial support for the proposed change. There were a few concerns raised about whether the proposed hours would impact more on selected users such as those who prefer to visit the sites earlier in the day. Having considered the range of respondent feedback, officers wish to recommend this proposal to decision makers.</p>		

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