



ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

REVISION OF OPERATIONAL PRACTICES AT RECYCLING CENTRES

REPORT BY HEAD OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

Council Executive on 25 April 2023 resolved that officers bring a quarterly performance report to this PDSP in relation to the Revision of Operational Practices at Recycling Centres.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the PDSP;

1. Notes the performance information for the period 2 October to 31 December 2023;
2. Notes that across the five household recycling sites, 76,555 bookings have been made from 2 October 2023 to 31 December 2023 accounting for 78% of the available booking capacity in October, 85% in November and 90% in December 2023.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Caring and compassionate; open, honest and accountable; collaborate, inclusive and adaptive
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	<p>All activities within Recycling & Waste Services ensure the council is compliant with statutory requirements at Scottish, UK and EU level with respect to the collection, recovery, treatment and disposal of household waste</p> <p>The Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 requires that Local Authorities provide sites where a person can dispose of refuse free of charge. The exception to this is refuse generated by business activities.</p> <p>An appraisal of the risks posed by lone working has been undertaken and CRC hours and working patterns ensure that two operatives are on site during operational hours.</p>
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None
IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators	<p>Potential for impact of varying degrees on recycling rates due to the reduction in Recycling Centre operating hours and drop in access.</p> <p>Potential for increased complaints due to perceived reductions in the level of service offered.</p>

- V Relevance to Local Outcome Improvement Plan** TBC
- VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)** A budget reduction of £336,000 from 2023/24 was approved by Council on 21 February 2023.
- A reduction of 9FTE in staffing at the Recycling Centres has been implemented.
- All five Recycling Centres have been retained.
- VII Consultation at PDSP** Environment and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel 28 March 2023
- VIII Other consultations** HR Services, Financial Management Unit, Corporate Transformation Team

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

On 21 February 2023 Council agreed to review the Recycling Centre opening hours to achieve a saving of £336,000 delivered within 2023/24. The proposal provided a 9.0FTE reduction in staffing at the Recycling Centres achieving the required saving.

This was discussed at Environment and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel on 28 March 2023 where officers received comments on the proposed options.

On 25 April 2023 Council Executive agreed to maintain all five Recycling Centres and reduce the operating hours from 280 hours per week to 144 hours per week to make the saving required. Revised operational practices were implemented on 2 October 2023.

Table 1: Operating Hours from 2 October 2023

Location	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday		
Oakbank	Open	X	Open	X	Open	Open	Open		
Whitburn	Open	X	Open	X	Open	Open	Open		
Blackburn	X	Open	X	Open	X	Open	Open		
Broxburn	X	X	X	Open	X	X	Open	Open	X
Linlithgow	X	Open	X	X	X	Open	X	X	Open

Bookings can be made to visit the Recycling Centres between the hours of 10:00 – 18:00, with the exception of weekends at Linlithgow and Broxburn when bookings are accepted 10:00 - 14:00, or 14:00 - 18:00

Prior to this change, all five of West Lothian's Recycling Centres had been open from 10am to 6pm, seven days a week. This pattern had been in place since 01 June 2020 when the Recycling Centres reopened following the Covid-19 pandemic closure.

The Recycling Centres have undergone significant changes since 2015. Operating hours were reduced in 2015 under Delivering Better Outcomes. Deans Recycling Centre was closed in 2018 as part of the move to Whitehill Service Centre. As part of the Transforming Your Council savings measures the operating hours at the Recycling Centres were further reduced in 2019. A motion at the budget meeting in February 2020 provided additional funding to

reinstate standardised and extended opening hours across all five Recycling Centres, which was implemented in June that year.

Finally, the changes agreed by Council Executive in April 2023, reduced the operating hours to the current 144 hours per week.

D.2 Communication of Changes

In advance of the change being made, multiple dedicated posts were made on Social Media, large banners were installed at every Recycling Centre and the operatives began handing out information cards to customers to raise awareness.

The council website has been updated throughout, with a new page created to link to the booking system and answer several Frequently Asked Questions: <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/crcbooking>.

Information on the changes has appeared in last three editions of Bulletin and in the local press. It has also been disseminated through Community Council and Local Area Committee meetings.

Recycling & Waste continue to engage with anyone visiting the Recycling Centres who has not booked in advance and provide them with information and guidance on how to make a booking.

D.3 Customer Booking

Following the implementation of reduced hours in May 2019, to deliver a saving of £321,000, the Council's five Recycling Centres operated with the following pattern:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Oakbank	8am - 2pm		8am - 2pm		8am - 2pm	10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm
Whitburn	8am - 2pm		8am - 2pm		8am - 2pm	10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm
Blackburn		8am - 2pm		8am - 2pm		10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm
Linlithgow		8am - 2pm		8am - 2pm		10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm
Broxburn		8am - 2pm		8am - 2pm		10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm

These operating hours were in place from May 2019 to March 2020. The operational experience garnered during this period established the need for additional traffic control measures to accompany any similar reduction in operating hours.

All vans and cars towing trailers have been required to make an online booking in advance to visit a Recycling Centre since August 2020. The requirement to book was extended to include all vehicle types on 02 October 2023.

The Recycling Centre booking system also ensures customers have guaranteed access and reduced waiting times. It enables the Council to manage and prevent unauthorised commercial use. This approach has been successfully implemented in neighbouring authorities.

The standard time slots for those visiting in a car are 30 minutes long. Each slot can be booked by between 20 and 30 customers, depending upon the capacity of the Recycling Centre. A 30-minute slot allows people the time to attend if they are delayed leaving or arriving at the site and allows operatives to carry out operational tasks. This also minimises queueing outside or inside the Recycling Centres, as there is not space for all vehicles booked in each 30 minutes to arrive or park at the same time, and they may want to use the same containers. Capacity has to be retained to recover from closing the site to safely operate compaction equipment, enable containers to be exchanged, or external contractors to uplift

materials or service containers. Overloading the time slots will result in no capacity being available for those visiting to dispose of their waste.

The table below outlines the total number of booking slots that have been available across the 5 Recycling Centres in the first three months of the revised operating model. It confirms that there has been overall sufficient capacity available each month with bookings accounting for 78% of available capacity in October, 85% in November and 90% in December 2023. These figures include booking 'no shows' where a booking has been made but a customer has subsequently not appeared for their slot.

Table 2: HWRC Bookings

	2-31 October	1-30 November	1-31 December
Maximum slots available	29,404	30,328	30,805
Bookings Made	22,981	25,843	27,731
Remaining availability	6,423	4,485	3,074
No shows	1,987 (9% of bookings)	1,319 (5% of bookings)	1,900 (7% of bookings)
% Slots booked	78%	85%	90%
% Slots available	22%	15%	10%

The initial limits were set using the average number of vehicles each site received per hour during 2022. Based on observation of traffic flow, the number of bookings per hour available at Linlithgow and Broxburn was increased from 20 to 30 in November and to 40 per hour in January. The flow of traffic will continue to be monitored and the number of bookings available per time slot increased where it is operationally feasible to do so and can be sustained.

In 2022, the Recycling Centres averaged 45,000 visits per month. There is currently capacity for 30,328 bookings per month to be made, equivalent to 67% of the previous average number of visits. The booking system has enabled traffic flow to be managed to maximise capacity whilst operating hours have been reduced by 49% to achieve the required saving.

Table 3: No Shows by Recycling Centre

	October 2023			November 2023			December 2023		
	Bookings Made	No Shows	%	Bookings Made	No Shows	%	Bookings Made	No Shows	%
Blackburn	5,271	402	8	5,853	277	5	5,885	286	5
Broxburn	1,279	266	21	1,947	406	21	2,182	346	16
Linlithgow	1,511	135	9	1,793	135	8	1,814	297	16
Oakbank	9,142	756	8	9,791	214	2	10,075	557	6
Whitburn	5,778	428	7	6,459	287	4	7,775	414	5
Total	22,981	1,987	9	25,843	1,319	5	27,731	1,900	7

On average, 18% of bookings made for Broxburn Recycling Centre do not result in a visit. All customers booking online receive a confirmation and a reminder email, both of which contain links to amend or cancel bookings. When a booking is cancelled the place automatically becomes available for someone else to book.

New slots are released on a rolling basis, one day at a time, for a fortnight ahead. This helps to minimise the number of no shows by ensuring bookings are made closer to the intended visit and based on an established need rather than a prospective requirement.

Across the first three months of the changes, the average percentage of bookings made against slots available is 85%. Excluding no shows, the average attendance at CRC's over the three months is 79% of capacity. Officers will continue to engage with customers using our communication channels to encourage customers who don't intend to use their allocated

booking slot, to cancel them on the booking system which has the potential to free up more available slots.

Table 4: Availability by Recycling Centre

	October 2023			November 2023			December 2023		
	Total Slots	% Booked	% Available	Total Slots	% Booked	% Available	Total Slots	% Booked	% Available
Blackburn	6,652	79%	21%	6,652	88%	12%	6,435	91%	9%
Broxburn	1,356	94%	6%	1,994	98%	2%	2,215	99%	1%
Linlithgow	1,532	99%	1%	1,818	99%	1%	1,845	98%	2%
Oakbank	9,932	92%	8%	9,932	99%	1%	10,155	99%	1%
Whitburn	9,932	58%	42%	9,932	65%	35%	10,155	77%	23%
Total	29,404	78%	22%	30,328	85%	15%	30,805	90%	10%

D.4 Recycling and Waste Collected

The table below provides a comparison of the total tonnages of Recycling Centre waste collected at each Recycling Centre from October to December 2023, compared to the same quarter in 2022.

Table 5: Tonnes Collected October – December 2023

	Blackburn	Broxburn	Linlithgow	Oakbank	Whitburn	TOTAL
2022	975.64	639.38	488.78	1665.11	1095.78	4864.68
2023	788.65	319.19	308.31	1195.77	863.09	3475.02
Tonnage change	-186.99	-320.19	-180.46	-469.34	-232.70	-1389.67
Percentage change	19%	50%	37%	28%	21%	29%

It is not possible to provide a recycling rate before recovery from mixed waste collected has taken place and figures are verified by SEPA.

The options presented to deliver the approved savings required the staffing budget to be supported by a reduction in waste disposal costs. This reduction was expected to amount to £70,000 per annum, due to improved control of commercial businesses and residents of other Local Authority areas using West Lothian's Recycling Centres. Based on the reduction in tonnes collected to date this target should be met.

D.5 Flytipping Activity

A flytipping campaign was launched in September 2023 with the aim of raising public awareness to improve reporting of incidents.

The table below provides details of flytipping tonnages collected for October to December 2023, compared to the same period in the previous year.

Table 6: Flytipping Activity

	2-31 October		1-30 November		1-31 December		Total Oct-Dec	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
Tonnes Collected	23	17	33	36	10	13	66	66

Over the three-month period to 31 December 2023, the weight of flytipping collected is consistent with the equivalent period in 2022.

The flytipping that the council collects is not generally household waste and is of a commercial nature. The reduction in tonnages collected at the 5 recycling centres has not coincided with an increase in flytipping tonnages. This further supports the evidence that flytipping tends to be commercial in nature and does not provide a direct link between flytipping and our Recycling Centres.

D.6 Enquiries and Complaints

Contact Service Centre Advisors logged a total of 1,030 enquiries by telephone relating to Recycling Centre bookings from October to December 2023. This number does not include the number of emails handled.

Table 7: Contact Service Centre Calls

	October	November	December
Operational Services Calls Offered	2,042	1,821	1,532
Calls logged to CRC Bookings Line	403	337	290

The number of enquiries by telephone are decreasing each month. Not all calls result in a booking being made, however, the number of calls logged represent 1.35% of the total number of bookings made.

A total of 102 Recycling Centre enquiries were raised in CONFIRM from 4/10/2023 – 31/12/2023, common issues were as follows:

Table 8: CONFIRM Customer Enquiries and Complaints

Common issues	October	November	December	Total
Complaint reduced operating hours	8	6	5	19
Query van/trailer access	7	5	11	23
Query missing address/ postcode	6	4	1	11
Query access policy	3	4	1	8
Query booking confirmation	4	4	3	11
Query on materials accepted	2	3	2	7
Query to cancel booking	2	3	3	8
Vehicle details do not match DVLA database	2	2	0	4
Complaint- site closing early	0	2	0	2
Complaint- can't get through on phone	0	1	0	1
Complaint- abusive member of public	1	0	0	1
Query to amend booking	1	0	4	5
Complaint- faulty QR code	1	0	0	1
Query- order of booking system	1	0	0	1
	38	34	30	102

The number of Recycling Centre enquiries raised in CONFIM is decreasing each month. The total represents 0.13% of the total number of bookings made.

E. CONCLUSION

On 02 October 2023 Recycling Centre opening hours were reduced from 280 hours per week to 144 hours per week, and a 9.0FTE reduction in staffing at the Recycling Centres implemented to make the £336,000 saving required. All five Recycling Centres have been retained.

Across the five Recycling Centres, 76,555 bookings were made between 02 October and 31 December 2023, with 22% of available slots remaining unused in October, 15% in November and 10% in December 2023.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Revision of Operational Practices at Household Waste Recycling Centres – Transforming Your Council – Report by Head of Operational Services to Environment PDSP 30 October 2018 and Council Executive 15 January 2019

Revenue Budget 2023/24 to 2027/28 - report by Head of Finance and Property Services to Council 20 February 2023

Revision of Operational Practices at Community Recycling Centres – Report by Head of Operational Services to Environment and Sustainability PDSP 28 March 2023 and Council Executive 25 April 2023

Appendices: None

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