

Divisions Affected - All

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

14 November 2024

Household Waste Recycling Centres – Implementation of a Booking System

Report by Director of Environment and Highways

RECOMMENDATION

The Deputy Leader is **RECOMMENDED** to

- a) **Approve the introduction of booking systems at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), supported by the provision of Meet and Greet site staff.**
- b) **Delegate authority to the Director of Environment and Highways in consultation with the Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer to agree modifications to the existing HWRC contracts with the contractors and enter into any necessary agreements.**

Executive Summary

1. The report outlines the immediate specific need and wider longer-term benefit of operating a booking system at Oxfordshire's HWRCs. The short-term need is the temporary closure of Redbridge to enable some urgent site safety works to be undertaken which is expected to place additional pressure at the other sites. The wider benefits anticipated are financial savings as a result of improved site operations and a reduction in total waste tonnages handled.
2. The Introduction of a booking system is also in line with other local authorities (including neighbouring ones). They have reported that they have received strong feedback that introducing this initiative along with other measures to control demand has led to greater success both in terms of financial savings, better environmental outcomes, and smoother operations on site.

Exempt Information

3. Not applicable.

Background/ Context

4. The introduction of a booking system will require residents to pre-book a timeslot prior to attending any of Oxfordshire's HWRCs. This will produce a financial saving to the authority as well as improve environmental outcomes by increasing recycling and reducing the amount of residual waste. These benefits shall primarily be achieved by enabling better management of customers using the service, but also through helping to minimise the potential for queues by managing site demand, especially during busier periods.
5. The HWRC sites should only be used by householders/ residents for their household waste, however it is believed there is substantial abuse of the system by commercial/ trade operators depositing waste free of charge. The Booking System could stop this trade abuse through the additional checks required to get a booking. In a similar way the system could be used to control use of the service by non-Oxfordshire residents. These two areas would generate savings through an overall reduction in waste handled on the sites and directing that waste which is handled on site away from the Energy Recovery Facility route.
6. On an immediate basis, Redbridge HWRC in Oxford will need to close for an anticipated 3 months for critical stabilisation work that cannot be avoided. This is provisionally programmed to begin in February 2025. Redbridge HWRC would expect around 40,000 customers over those 3 months, and it is expected that these customers will go to their nearest alternative site. The Booking System will greatly help manage this increased demand over and above normal levels at the other sites, meaning a reduction in queuing times, reduced local disruption and maintaining overall HWRC site performance.

Challenge

7. The network of 7 HWRCs meet the statutory requirement for the council to provide a location for Oxfordshire residents to dispose of their household waste. Having undertaken some discussions with other local authorities who have introduced Booking Systems, the service believes there is an opportunity to reduce demand and therefore costs at these sites. This is also important in the context of housing growth and the associated increased amount of household waste.
8. There is currently a residual waste container on each site where customers can dispose of unsorted (mixed) household waste and household waste for which there is no separate recycling on the sites. Site teams do their best to intercept waste that can be recycled before it is placed in this residual waste container, but this is not efficient under current operational practices. Demand management and maximising diversion of waste away from the residual waste

stream for disposal and into recycling and reuse are key measures to effectively control the cost of the HWRC service which is currently costing around £3.5m pa.

9. Analysis of the residual waste bin at the HWRCs has identified that up to 60% of the residual waste bin could be recycled either at the HWRC, or at the kerbside. Residual waste from the HWRCs is disposed of by energy recovery at high cost. Reducing the amount of residual waste disposed in this way is expected to present a significant cost saving to the authority.
10. In a public consultation carried out on the Let's Talk portal from July to September 2021, 1,290 out of 1,832 (70%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal that *"If a resident comes to a site with unsorted bags of mixed waste, they will be asked to sort it at the HWRC, so as much of it as possible can be reused or recycled"*. A Booking System would provide the right site operational conditions for the implementation of the sorting of this mixed waste.
11. The HWRC sites are provided for Oxfordshire residents to dispose of their own household waste however, unlike our neighbouring authorities and many others across the country, Oxfordshire does not limit use of HWRCs to Oxfordshire residents only, however most of the neighbouring authorities do restrict use of their sites to only their residents. The Council has evidence that out of county residents routinely come into Oxfordshire to use the HWRCs. Reasons for this are likely to be because of the closer proximity of Oxfordshire's sites to the resident's home irrespective of county boundaries, or to take advantage of different financial charges made for specific waste streams or different opening hours. Therefore, the Council has a situation where Oxfordshire residents are prevented from using neighbouring authority facilities, however their residents are still able to use those within Oxfordshire leading to increased service costs for the County.
12. Perhaps more significantly the Council is aware that commercial waste is illegally deposited at the sites by companies seeking to avoid paying for their trade waste. This waste is delivered in cars and vans and because it is similar in nature to genuine household waste it can be difficult to identify, prove and prevent this activity with our current control mechanisms.

Booking System Proposal

13. The introduction of a booking system would require all customers to book a timeslot online before travelling to a HWRC. This is already in place for customers who wish to use their free allocation of DIY waste, and this process works well.
14. The advantages of a booking system are:

- Better management of the flow of customers through our Household Waste Recycling Centre network, reducing queues which at times can be significant, causing local disruption.
 - Allowing the site teams more time to proactively assist customers and maximise the amount of material sent for recycling, rather than disposal as residual waste which is far more costly.
 - Enable direct, targeted communication to customers on matters relating to their scheduled visit.
 - Enable the authority to control cross border usage in future, potentially by only allowing Oxfordshire residents to make a booking, reducing the authority's exposure to those additional service costs.
 - Help with the identification and prevention of trade abuse by preventing commercial addresses from registering a booking, to enabling better analysis of data to identify unusual patterns of site usage for further investigation.
15. A significant number of local authorities introduced booking systems when facilities reopened following closure for 8 weeks during the Covid pandemic. It is noted that these authorities report that the quantity of waste they receive at the facilities has permanently reduced as a result, and that customers once they have become accustomed to the booking system have adjusted their behaviour accordingly and appreciate the lack of queues. As a result, many of these authorities have retained their booking systems permanently. At Oxfordshire we already have a booking system for free DIY waste which is working well.
16. Given the imminent temporary closure of Redbridge HWRC, but also the public profile of the service, the current financial pressures, it is essential the implementation of a booking system goes forward in readiness for then.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

17. Oxfordshire County Council Household Waste Recycling Centre Strategy 2023-2043, approved by Cabinet in September 2023.

The aim of the new HWRC strategy is to have a long-term plan for OCC's HWRC network, detailing where the HWRC's need to be sited in the context of long-term population increases and housing growth across Oxfordshire, changing waste legislation, and accounting for the current infrastructure condition, planning and ownership status of the existing HWRC Sites. The strategy details the ambition for improving OCC's recycling rates and enabling re-use facilities at HWRC Sites.

Financial Implications

18. The estimated cost of a booking system software is around £25k for the first year (including set up costs), with costs reducing for some suppliers for the annual subscription and maintenance of the system. The cost of additional "meet and greet" personnel to support the use of the system will depend upon negotiation with the site management contractors, although this is anticipated to cost around £300k per annum. It is well understood that "meet and greet" personnel are essential to the successful implementation of a Booking System

as they verify that Oxfordshire residents visiting the sites have made a booking before entry.

19. The Booking System, when fully implemented and supported by meet and greet will provide a tool to deliver committed MTFP savings through:
 - (a) supporting the related 'Unsorted Waste' project,
 - (b) reducing site usage by businesses/ traders,
 - (c) managing out of county site users
 - (d) generally allowing site staff to better oversee the usage of the sites.
 - (e) Other service changes may be introduced that are easier to implement with a Booking System in place.
20. The 'Unsorted Waste' project had previously been identified in the MTFP for 2024/25 as a means to save £200k pa. This saving has already been reported as being not achievable this year, partly because of the need for a Booking System to already be in place to deliver it successfully. With the anticipated savings from the initiative, it is considered the costs can be met within existing budgets inclusive of the committed £200k pa saving.
21. It is acknowledged that there is a risk on the anticipated savings materialising, but this is considered a relatively low risk as evidence from other local authorities indicates that booking systems do deliver significant savings and importantly are a mechanism to allow further savings from other service changes alluded to above. Officers will be monitoring the introduction of the change very closely and support success through robust contract management to ensure effective delivery on the ground.

Comments checked by: Filipp Skiffin, Assistant Finance Business Partner,
Filipp.Skiffins@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

22. Pursuant to section 30 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (the Act) the council, being a county council, is a waste disposal authority for the purposes of Part II of the Act. Under section 51 of the Act (which falls under Part II) waste disposal authorities have a statutory duty to provide residents with a place to deposit their household waste and to dispose of the waste so deposited. HWRCs must be reasonable accessible and available at all reasonable times.
23. The service will continue to be provided, albeit with the requirement to book in advance, and therefore no legal implications arise.
24. The booking system will be procured in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. Variations to the HWRC Contracts will be made in accordance with the change control procedures contained in the contracts and in accordance with procurement law as applicable.

Comments checked by: Jayne Pringle, Head of Law & LBP (Contracts & Conveyancing) Jayne.Pringle@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

25. The project will be delivered through existing staffing resources.

Risk Management

26. The initial introduction of these changes may be contentious which could initiate a rise in complaints and in negative publicity with associated reputational issues for the Council to manage. The use of Meet and Greet at each site is seen as being vital to the effective implementation of a Booking System and is why it is being proposed here with the Booking System. In addition, a comprehensive communications campaign will be introduced ahead of the rollout of the Booking System.
27. As discussed in the Financial Implications section of this report there are significant risks around the current budget and financing of this service change. However, through effective implementation of the changes it anticipated that this is a relatively low risk.
28. DEFRA have previously consulted with local authorities on the use of booking systems and have indicated their concerns about the limitations this is perceived to place on residents wanting to use the sites. It is possible that DEFRA will revisit this.
29. Project Risks for the Booking System will be set up to track these areas.

Consultations

30. The Council did undertake a public engagement exercise in 2021 that covered a wider range of questions looking at HWRC waste acceptance and access procedures. This indicated that residents supported the 'unsorted waste'/ black bag splitting project, though there was less clear-cut support at the time for a related Booking System. It is now recognised that a Booking System is necessary for the 'unsorted waste' aspect and given the more recent evidence of the successful implementation of Booking Systems by other local authorities a new consultation is not proposed for this service change.

Paul Fermer
Director of Environment & Highways

Annex: See below
Contact Officer: Jeffrey Farrell,
Household Waste Recycling Centre Manager

October 2024

Annex

Equality & Inclusion Implications

1. The booking system has been assessed through an Equalities Impact Assessment, and it is not considered to directly bias or discriminate against individuals or groups. However, a consequence of having an online booking system could impact on a very small percentage of residents who do not have access to the internet. We will put in mitigation measures and work with the Customer Contact Centre to enable those residents to make a booking over the phone, mirroring the existing process which allows residents who do not have internet access to apply for van or trailer e-permits.

Sustainability Implications

2. This scheme will actively encourage residents to sort their recycling from their non-recyclables, helping Oxfordshire drive up recycling rates, which enables resources to be kept in circulation for longer and works towards our target to become carbon neutral by 2050.

A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed for the booking system, and it has been determined that it will have a net positive impact on sustainability of the Household Waste Recycling Centres service. This system will help residents plan and reduce the need for unnecessary trips, manage peak demand time for sites by limiting the number of visitors, therefore reducing queuing and idling times and help communicate key messages to residents on waste prevention and maximising recycling.

November 2024.