

PETITIONS COMMITTEE

DATE: 27th APRIL 2023

REPORT ON PETITION - CAMPAIGN TO REVERSE THE DECISION TO REDUCE OPENING HOURS AT PRUDHOE HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECOVERY CENTRE

Report of: Service Director - Local Services, Paul Jones

Cabinet Member: John Riddle, Environment & Local Services

Purpose of Report

To inform this committee of the submission of a petition that seeks to reverse the decision taken by the County Council at its meeting on 22nd February 2023 to reduce the opening hours at Prudhoe Household Waste Recovery Centre. The decision to reduce the HWRC opening hours was taken as part of the efficiency savings required when setting the Council's budget for 2023/24. The efficiency saving that was agreed also included the implementation of reduced opening hours at Morpeth HWRC. This report seeks to provide information supporting the Council's decision and to provide assurance about future mitigating actions to address the petitioners' concerns about increases in fly tipping in the Prudhoe area and potential impacts on recycling performance resulting from the decision.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Petitions Committee note the content of this report and support the reasons for the decision to reduce the opening hours at Prudhoe Household Waste Recovery Centre (HWRC). Furthermore, that the committee acknowledge assurances that the Council will closely monitor the recycling performance of the facility and any adverse impacts on the local environment, namely increased fly tipping in the Prudhoe area, and will take appropriate mitigating action if necessary.

Link to Corporate Plan

How - "We want to be efficient, open and work for everyone"

Enjoying - "We want you to love where you live"

Connecting - "We want you to have access to the things you need"

Key Issue

- The Council has taken a decision to reduce the number of days the HWRC's at Prudhoe and another site at Morpeth will operate from seven days per week Monday to Sunday, to four days over Friday to Monday inclusive, to deliver a

£60,000 per annum revenue saving through improved operational efficiencies whilst still maintaining an accessible waste service to residents. It is intended that the new opening arrangements will be implemented from Tuesday 16th May 2023.

- The Council made the decision as part of the 2023/24 annual budget setting report, in line with the principles of a previous decision taken to reduce opening days at five other HWRC's, which has proven to be effective without causing adverse impacts on residents or the local environment.
- Through a petition, residents in Prudhoe have raised their objection to the decision with concerns about the potential for increased fly tipping because of individuals not being able to access the HWRC on those days when the facility is not open (Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays). In addition, concerns have also been raised that the reduced opening hours will lead to a drop in the recycling performance achieved at the Prudhoe HWRC.
- These concerns are acknowledged and appreciated, in the context of a local, regional, and national spotlight on the number of reported fly tip incidents and the need to maximise recycling rates to secure environmental benefits.
- It is the intention of this report to evidence that reduced opening hours previously implemented at other Northumberland HWRC's have not resulted in adverse impacts and allowed the Council to sustainably fund high quality service provision and avoid adverse outcomes such as closing sites and reducing geographic coverage of HWRC's across the County.
- This response aims to provide assurance to residents that the Council will monitor closely the impact of the decision and put in place any future mitigation in the unlikely event that adverse issues result.

Background

- The Council provides 12 HWRC's across the County for the acceptance of household waste for reuse, recycling, composting, energy recovery or disposal. This service is in addition to the kerbside collection services for general and recyclable household waste, and the chargeable services for collection of garden waste and bulky items of household waste.
- The HWRC's are open to residents between the hours of 8 am to 7:30 pm from 1st April to 31st October, and 8am to 6 pm from 1st November to 31st March.
- The increasing costs of operating HWRC's located across a geographically large County as Northumberland resulted in a detailed review of the service in 2016.
- The outcome of that review was that the geographic coverage of the network of 12 HWRCs should be maintained, but that 5 of the HWRCs should operate over a reduced number of days (Friday through Monday). This approach sought to

change usage patterns to deliver efficiency savings whilst ensuring communities did not have to travel further to access HWRCs and by retaining the existing long opening hours on the days that the sites were open residents would continue to enjoy a retained level and quality of service. The new opening days also ensured that the sites would be open as normal during the Easter and summer Bank Holidays and to cover the busier weekend seasonal periods.

- This approach to maintaining an HWRC service across all Northumberland sites, regardless of the usage and volume of waste handled, which does directly affect the operational efficiency of each individual facility, was agreed in a formal Council Decision taken and recorded in 2017.
- In the period since opening hours were reduced at 5 HWRC's at Allendale, Haltwhistle, Kirkley West Thorn, North Sunderland and Wooler, residents have adapted to the new opening arrangements without ongoing concern, and there have been no significant issues of increased local fly tipping.
- This contrasts with several neighbouring authorities who have had to significantly reduce daily opening hours at sites to maintain HWRC services. Northumberland residents enjoy the longest daily opening hours across the region which it is considered provides residents with ample time to deliver their household waste before during and after conventional working hours, while the impact of waste haulage and site staffing operational costs are most efficient in rural or low throughput sites when operated over a compressed '4 day' week.
- Further budget pressures have necessitated a review of the service to improve efficiency. This review was undertaken based on the principles of the previous review which have been shown to work without adverse effects and has enabled the existing 12 HWRC's opening hours to be maintained over a significant period.
- Whilst it is acknowledged that these changes will mean some residents in effected areas will have to plan their trips to their local HWRC more carefully, it is considered that the new opening arrangements minimise the overall impact on HWRC users, whilst still providing those residents who are affected with ample opportunity to deliver waste to a conveniently located HWRC, which is open long hours for the majority of the week and offers a comprehensive range of reuse, recycling, composting and disposal services.
- It is important to note that fly tipping is a criminal offence and most householders do understand that any initial inconvenience suffered when adapting to the revised opening times would be far outweighed by the imposition of fines and a criminal record if apprehended. Most fly tipping offences are carried out by individuals carrying non household waste who refuse to comply with the legal obligations to manage waste compliantly. There is no need for residents to fly tip and break the law when they can use the free of charge HWRC facilities provided for them.
- It is for this reason that significant increases in fly tipping in the Prudhoe area resulting from the decision are not anticipated.

- The Council conducts regular resident satisfaction surveys for its waste services, which includes a specific section for the HWRC service. Resident satisfaction in 2018/19 was 87% and for 2022/23 this was to 85%.
- Recycling rates at HWRC's for the period immediately following the reductions to the opening days at the five sites in 2017 were not significantly affected, being; 2017 (67.7%), 2018 (66.5%), 2019 (66.1%) and 2020 (66.9%).
- The quantity of waste delivered to the Prudhoe HWRC has reduced in recent years from 3,594 tonnes per annum in 2018/19 to 3,200 tonnes per annum in 2021/22.

Mitigations

- Neighbourhood Services teams now use accurate systems to report all fly tipping at a geographic level and this level of information is recorded in sufficient detail as part of the Neighbourhood NEAT team activity to identify issues at a very local level. Any increase in fly tipping or any other adverse environmental impact will be recorded to allow mitigations to be implemented if proven to be needed in future.
- New site signage advising residents of the revised opening times at the HWRC will be displayed at the site several weeks in advance of the new opening days coming into effect and details of the new arrangements will be widely publicised through the Council's website, social media posts and press releases in advance of the change.
- Any waste fly tipped at the entrance to the HWRC in the days following the changes will be removed and residents contacted where identifiable to provide education and advice followed by enforcement action where necessary.

Implications

Policy	The response to the issues raised in the petition is consistent with existing policy on HWRC provision and a previous council decision to reduce opening hours at less frequently used HWRC's to ensure service efficiency rather than close facilities.
Finance and value for money	The implementation of the change to the Prudhoe HWRC opening hours will result in a saving of £30,000 per annum together with a similar saving at Morpeth HWRC where changes are to be implemented, without impacting on recycling performance, quality of the service provided or adverse local environmental impacts. Furthermore, this decision avoids alternative means to achieve required service efficiencies through the closure of some of the 12 existing HWRC's.
Legal	None

Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	None
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Equality Impact Assessment setting out impacts of change based on previous experience of similar HWRC reductions and mitigations proposed is attached as Appendix 3.
Risk Assessment	n/a
Crime & Disorder	n/a
Customer Consideration	<p>Re-configure opening reducing days, maintaining existing long opening hours and range of waste accepted to ensure efficiency and quality of the service is maintained.</p> <p>Ensure measures are in place to monitor and investigate fly tipping in the Prudhoe area to address petitioners' concerns about potential increase fly tipping.</p> <p>Site information notices and Council Website information and social media posts to publicise and raise awareness of the new opening arrangements prior to the change taking place (due to come into effect on Tuesday 16th May 2023).</p> <p>Hexham HWRC offers access 7-days per week if for whatever reason residents are unable to take waste to the Prudhoe HWRC on its opening days. Bulky waste and garden waste collection services are also available.</p>
Carbon reduction	n/a
Wards	Prudhoe North, Prudhoe South, Bywell, Stocksfield and Broomhaugh.

Appendices

Appendix A - Original Petition Report

Appendix B - Ward Councillor and Parish Council Consultation Letter

Appendix C - Equalities Impact Assessment

Report sign off

	Name
Finance Officer	N/A
Monitoring Officer/Legal	N/A
Human Resources	N/A
Procurement	N/A
I.T.	N/A
Director	RM
Portfolio Holder(s)	JR

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