

COUNCIL – 8 APRIL 2024

RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL – 28 MARCH 2024

RESPONSE TO MOTION – HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PLANS TO CLOSE MARCHWOOD AND SOMERLEY RECYCLING CENTRES / LOCAL AUTHORITY FINANCES

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) That the Council note the Panel's views on the proposed corporate response to the Hampshire County Council (HCC) Future Services Consultation set out by the Council's Section 151 Officer, including the specific response which objects to the plans to close Marchwood and Somerley Recycling Centres, as submitted to HCC on 28 March 2024 (Appendix 1);
- b) That the Council note that the Panel endorsed, without amendment, the proposed content of the letter to the Government on local authority finances, to be sent by the Leader of the Council, detailed throughout section 4 of this report.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In accordance with Standing Order 21, at the Council meeting of 26 February 2024, Cllr J Davies moved the following motion which was seconded by Cllr Rackham:-

"This Council is concerned by Hampshire County Council's plans to close Marchwood and Somerley Recycling Centres.

This Council believes these plans will increase fly-tipping in the New Forest and mean more money is spent by New Forest District Council on removing fly-tipped waste.

This Council calls for a corporate response to the consultation to be prepared expressing this council's opposition to the closure of any New Forest Recycling Centre.

This Council further calls on the Leader of the Council to write to the Government highlighting the dire financial situation of local authorities and urging the Government to make more funding available so local authorities do not have to cut vital public services."

- 2.2 Under the provisions of Standing Order 42, the above motion, after being proposed and seconded (without speeches), was referred to the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel for consideration, given the Panel's planned consideration of the HCC Future Services Consultation. It was duly considered by that Panel at its meeting on 28 March 2024.
- 2.3 The motion is broken down into two constituent parts for the purpose of this report.

3. PART 1 – HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FUTURE SERVICES CONSULTATION

- 3.1 The Panel considered the Council's corporate response to the Future Services consultation, noting that the response had been initiated by senior officers, and relevant Portfolio Holders had also been consulted with. The Panel agreed the proposed response, subject to strengthening certain sections concerning the Household Recycling Centres, School Crossing Patrols, Passenger Transport, and Highways and Winter Maintenance.
- 3.2 The Council's Section 151 Officer, having considered the Panel's comments, submitted the final corporate response in line with the consultation close date of 31 March 2024. The response specific to the closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centres, being the focus of the motion, is outlined at Appendix 1 of this report.

4. PART 2 – LETTER TO THE GOVERNMENT

- 4.1 At its meeting on the 26 February 2024, the Council set a balanced budget for 2024/25. The budget was supported with a 4% funding guarantee grant from the government, worth £1.2 million.
- 4.2 The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan sets out a forecast budget deficit of £2.708 million to 2027/28 (equivalent to 11% of the Council's General Fund Budget). The financial strategy to 2027/28 seeks to identify efficiencies through the investment in the Transformation Programme, as well as increasing income through fees and charges reviews, and new income generating opportunities through adopted strategies.
- 4.3 The main area of frustration from the Council's Section 151 Officer's perspective is that government settlement funding has been provided of late through 1-year settlements, preventing effective long-term planning. It has been several years since a multi-year settlement has been provided. The Council has supported LGA and District Council's Network lobbying on this matter.
- 4.4 It is also notable that the forecast deficit of Hampshire County Council as the upper tier authority, with numerous demand led services, is significant on a cash basis at £132 million by April 2025.
- 4.5 It is also worthy of note that a new government will be formed between now and the 28 January 2025, which means a 1-year settlement for 2025/26 is likely, and of course the result may change the local government financial landscape further still.
- 4.6 Following the Leader's commitment at the Panel meeting to send a letter to the government, the Panel agreed the proposed content of that letter without amendment. This is summarised by the Council's Section 151 Officer in paragraphs 4.3-4.5 above, and as follows:-

"It would be appropriate to refer to the importance of the funding guarantee grant, and confirm how essential this was in achieving a sound balanced budget and its need to continue going forward. It would also be sensible to reference that the Council is concerned at the scale of the financial challenge faced by the upper tier authority (Hampshire County Council) and the implications that this may have to this Council's own financial position, and ultimately the potential detriment to local residents using and relying on vital local government services that could be significantly reduced, or stopped altogether if local authorities have to adopt a 'statutory service only' model in the near future."

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Although this report contains information pertaining to Council finances, there are none directly associated with the content or recommendations.

6. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No crime and disorder implications have been identified.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The consultation response sets out concerns of an environmental nature with regards to the potential closing of the Household Waste Recycling Centres.

8. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 No equality and diversity implications have been identified.

9. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 No data or privacy implications have been identified.

For further information contact:

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Background Papers:

[Resources and Transformation Overview
and Scrutiny Panel Report – 28 March
2024](#)

In response to the County Council's Future Services Consultation, New Forest District Council provided the following representations on Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs):

- 1. Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs):** To provide a sustainable, cost-effective and fit for purpose Household Waste Recycling service within a reduced budget. This might involve introducing charging for discretionary services, implementing alternative delivery models, reducing opening days and/or hours or reducing the number of HWRCs.

NFDC Response:

NFDC's view on the five proposed changes for HWRCs are as follows:

1. Introducing charging for discretionary services

The council supports this proposed action – it should be explored further. Through consultation, the County Council should be mindful of the potential impact to residents on low incomes and residents less able to pay to dispose of waste.

The council also supports continued lobbying on the ability to charge a small nominal fee for public access, as an alternative to closing HWRC's.

2. Alternative delivery models

NFDC does not feel this a service suitable for alternative service delivery. Whilst some elements of disposal such as reuse and resale can be appropriately supported by the VCS, the management of waste disposal is not suitable due to scale, risk, and regulation. NFDC has its own budget pressures, and as a collection authority plays its role in investing improvements to the waste system. We cannot pick up this statutory responsibility of the disposal authority. This would not lower the cost to the Hampshire council taxpayer, and there are no economies of scale such as those available in managing the sites as part of the wider network which already exists.

3. Changes to types of waste accepted at HWRCs

This proposal would seem to have the effect of requiring service users to travel further to dispose of some material streams. This is not supported by NFDC. This would have negative effects along the same lines as those described further down in relation to site closures.

4. Reducing the opening days and/or hours of HWRCs

NFDC supports this proposal only as an alternative to closing HWRCs. This is because it retains the local facility, just on a slightly reduced basis. Closing sites 1 day per week and reducing the opening hours by 2 hours per day Mon-Fri is a relatively small reduction in overall capacity that would deliver a significant contribution (c£750k) to the £1.2m target, whilst retaining full provision over the weekend, the busiest time of the week. NFDC feels this approach would significantly reduce the risks described below with regard to closure of sites. (NOTE – this combination of closing sites on some days AND reducing opening hours on others was not listed as an option in the relevant consultation question – we believe this is an oversight and should be explored).

5. Reducing the number of existing sites

NFDC does not support the option of closing two HWRCs within the NFDC area. This is because of the impact on our residents, the local environment, and the council itself. The reasons behind this are related to the following, explained further in turn below:

- Mileages/travel
- Flytipping
- Bring sites
- Kerbside collections

With regard to the closure of Somerley, the documentation points to the distances from Somerley to the next nearest HWRC as 19 miles. However, it should be noted that some residents already have to travel some distance to even get to Somerley. A resident of Fordingbridge, a town of over 6,000 people, already has a round-trip of journey of 16 miles to Somerley – this would increase to 36 miles to/from the next nearest site in Southampton. Users of Marchwood HWRC would see a lower % increase in mileage if the site were to close, but the journey would involve using congested routes into Southampton, to use a HWRC that is not under the control of HCC and which is therefore subject to the policies of a non-Hampshire authority. If access to this site for Hampshire residents were to cease, then the impact on mileages is even more significant.

The additional mileage will lead to longer journeys on roads across the open forest, increasing congestion and increasing local emissions, as well as endangering livestock on un-fenced roads. It will also disproportionately affect low-income families who would have to spend a greater amount of money on fuel.

Some residents of the New Forest (e.g. those in the north-west) would face a 1hr 20m round trip to their nearest HWRC. We do not feel this length of round trip meets the threshold of meeting your statutory duty under EPA 1990 section 51 which requires HWRC facilities to be 'reasonably accessible to persons resident in the area'. It is certainly outside of the 7 miles/30 minutes recommendations made by WRAP and referred to in the consultation paperwork.

NFDC believes that this would lead to some individuals attempting to dispose of their waste via other means in order to avoid this journey.

Firstly, NFDC believes an increase in flytipping would occur. During the COVID-19 pandemic, which included a period of HWRCs being closed, NFDC saw a dramatic and significant rise in all types of fly tipping. In the year April 2020 -March 2021 we collected 3600 flytips, against a 5-year average of under 900. This number has never returned to pre-pandemic levels and is currently 2500 incidents per year.

Increased flytipping would have a detrimental impact on key landowners including Forestry England, and livestock. The New Forest National Park and AONB within the New Forest already experiences fly-tipping that is detrimental to environmental standards, and HCC has a duty to further the aims of the National Park. We are concerned that loss of HWRC will lead to increasing degradation of the unique landscape and biodiversity present in the New Forest.

It would lead to increased cost of collection of flytips for NFDC, and ultimately the disposal cost would still fall to HCC. There could be particular issues with flytipping of materials that HWRCs currently cater for that are more difficult to dispose of via regular kerbside collections. This could include WEEE, paint, gas bottles, or waste contaminated by Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) etc. The need to separate these kinds of waste to comply with regulations would have a disproportionate impact on WCAs.

We'd expect two impacts of closures upon NFDC's bring site network:

- 1) The bring sites would attract flytipping of waste not suitable for bring site disposal, as the sites may be seen as substitute HWRCs. This would increase collection and enforcement costs for NFDC. During the covid-19 HWRC shutdown, NFDC recorded a huge increase in flytips at bring sites. In April 2019 we recorded 67 flytips across the district - flytips at bring sites were not of any recordable level. In April 2020, when HWRCs closed, NFDC collected 487 flytips, with 279 of these at the bring sites across the New Forest.*
- 2) Increased use of bring sites for legitimate material – in particular this would relate to cardboard. Our bring site containers are currently 1100l bins that cannot cope with large quantities of cardboard. To cope with the increased usage that would occur, these sites will require more frequent emptying schedules, more containers on site, or larger containers – this would lead to lost revenue in council car parks and require greater level of resource to collect.*

NFDC is about to invest a significant amount of money (c£10m in capital funding over the next 3 years alone) in a new kerbside collection system aimed at minimising waste and increasing recycling. Closure of HWRCs would push material into kerbside collections. This would include residents depositing more items, including garden waste, small WEEE, paint or other items, into their black bins. This not only misses the opportunity to divert these materials to recycling, it also increases the hazards around waste collection by diverting a wider range of unknown items into black bins.

Finally, closure of HWRCs does not mean that the waste that the waste was formerly taken there disappears. The cost of disposal of this material is still likely to fall to HCC indirectly, and probably not via the most cost-effective (£ per tonne) route that is available through the economies of scale of a HWRC network. Whilst closure may save on operating costs, much of this operating cost is passed to the WCA, who will collect the material via flytipping, bring sites or kerbside collections.

The Council Leader also wishes to include the following general representation on this matter:

“As the Leader of NFDC I am extremely worried about the proposed closing of the Waste Sites. This could have a huge impact on the Forest. We are custodians of this beautiful area, we are responsible for maintaining a healthy living environment, keeping all animals who inhabit the forest safe. We already suffer from fly tipping in certain areas, please re-think this policy change and do not close these sites. You will put a huge financial burden on District Councils who will have the costs associated with clearing up illegally dumped rubbish. Please look at the opening

*times or perhaps closing one day a week for some of the savings you need to find.
Our residents are also your residents please listen to them.”*