



# **Task and Finish Group Report**

**Herefordshire Household Recycling  
Centres**



# Herefordshire Household Recycling Centres - Review Report

## Chairman's Foreword

Recycling of household waste is recognised as an important facility and is considered essential by our population. This was illustrated by the task and finish group's survey in Herefordshire, this topic proving to be the most commented upon with some 324 responses; making it the most successful response to a scrutiny review since Scrutiny was founded. However, it was evident from opinions provided by both the surveyed population of Herefordshire and officers that the service did need to be reviewed, to ensure that the best possible service is being provided; and this we have done within Herefordshire.

We visited two household waste facility sites within Herefordshire, Rotherwas and Ledbury, which were staffed by Severn Waste operatives who were both knowledgeable and helpful and wanting to do a good job for the people of Herefordshire. They had good ideas for improvement of service and their views should be captured to enable a better service to be provided. From the people we interviewed it became evident that this good service is also provided at other Herefordshire household waste sites. This level of commitment and service attainment is to be applauded and their innovative ideas should be recognised and considered by their management and for consideration by the primary contract holder.

It is hoped that this review will provide essential information to inform the household waste review to be carried out by Worcestershire County Council. These recommendations are hopefully self-evident. Notwithstanding, there may be additional recommendations that could be suggested and service improvement should be considered as the contract 'goes forward'. So please let this document be an enabling document, whereby, betterment of the service should continue to be considered and if ideas are found to be capable of providing a better service, they be put in place. Where we in Herefordshire Council are able to make the service better then let us carry out the changes. Where there are contractual issues or operational issues then let us discuss how improvement to this service may be enabled.

Finally, I would like to put on record my thanks for assistance. I would like to thank my colleagues Councillor Sally Robertson and Councillor John Stone for their assistance and support in the completion of this task. Thanks also go to the waste specialist officers in Herefordshire Council, Worcester County Council and Severn Waste site operatives whom we met 'on the ground' their skills were clearly evident. The candour of these officers to our thoughts and questions has proved to be very helpful in coming to our conclusions. In addition, our thanks go to the members of the public who came along to be interviewed by us, their experiences and opinions were informative and very helpful. Finally, our sincerest thanks go to both Gemma Dean and Ben Baugh for their organisational skills, note taking and overall expertise - as usual they have proved to be exceptional. I truly could not have published this report without them and I thank them for their able assistance and guidance.

## **2 Executive Summary**

- 2.1 Herefordshire Council and Worcestershire County Council are in a joint partnership with a waste permit system operating at their respective recycling centres. In October 2013 the permit system was updated and a number of significant changes were introduced. A number of Councillors were contacted by members of the public expressing their dissatisfaction of the new system. As a result of this, a task and finish group was set up to review the system.
- 2.2 As the permit system is a joint system between Herefordshire and Worcestershire, some of the recommendations shall be for Herefordshire Council to implement, some shall be for Worcestershire County Council to implement and some will be for the provider, Severn Waste Services, to implement.
- 2.3 Although this review only looks at the Herefordshire sites, the task and finish group understands that there shall be a review of the system by Worcestershire County Council shortly. The task and finish group would like the findings of their review to form a solid basis for any changes that might help the Worcestershire sites.

## **3. Composition of the Task and Finish Group**

- 3.1 Members of the task and finish group were:  
Councillor Barry Durkin – Vice-Chair of General Overview and Scrutiny Committee (from 23 May 2014) and Chair of this task and finish group  
Councillor Sally Robertson  
Councillor John Stone
- 3.2 Lead Officer - Kenton Vigus
- 3.3 Officer - Alex Nicholas
- 3.4 Scrutiny Officer - Gemma Dean.
- 3.5 Democratic Services Officer - Ben Baugh

## **4**     **Context**

### Why Did We Set Up The Group?

- 4.1     In October 2013, the current Commercial Vehicle/Trailer Permit Policy was re-issued with a number of changes, including a limit on the number of permits issued to an individual and prohibiting certain vehicles from unloading waste at Herefordshire and Worcestershire Household Recycling Centres.
- 4.2     A number of complaints were received by Members of Herefordshire Council reference the changes to the permit system.
- 4.3     The General Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the designated scrutiny committee to review waste matters.
- 4.4.    As a direct result of the public complaints, this task and finish group was commissioned.

### What Were We Looking at?

- 4.5     In January 2013, a scoping statement was agreed for the task and finish group. The full scoping statement is attached at Appendix A.

### Who Did We Speak To?

- 4.6     Between January and April 2014, the group convened meetings, interviews and visits to gather as much background information and seek as many views as were required to make recommendations. In doing this, the group spoke to the following people:
  - Herefordshire Council's waste management team
  - Mr. V Connor, Waste Operations Manager, Worcestershire County Council
  - Mr. A Davies, Contract Monitoring Officer, Worcestershire County Council
  - Mr. C Sandman, Team Leader, Community Protection Team, Herefordshire Council
  - Employees on the Household Recycling Centres run by Severn Waste Services
  - Mrs C Sweet-Low, Customer Services Supervisor, Herefordshire Council
  - Household Recycling Centres users

### How Did We Engage With People?

4.7 The task and finish group wanted to use as many different ways of engagement with interviewees. The methods used were:

- Face to face interviews.
- Site visits to Ledbury and Rotherwas Household Recycling Centres.
- Site user survey - contained at Appendix B – Herefordshire Council's website and put on Ward Member and Parish Member updates.
- Members' questionnaire
- Email correspondence

### What Did We Read?

4.8 The group was provided background information to undertake this review. The documents that were used and are appended to this report are:

- The Commercial Vehicle/Trailer Permit Policy (CVT)
- Permit systems used by other local authorities
- Complaints reference the system
- Rejected loads information

## 5. Key Themes

5.1 Throughout the task and finish group, the following key themes were identified:

1. Communications and the relationship with Worcestershire County Council
2. The Survey carried out in Herefordshire only
3. The Household Recycling Centres in Herefordshire only

### Communications and the relationship with Worcestershire County Council

5.2 During the task and finish review, the group heard about the transition period in October 2013 when the new changes came into place. The group was able to see from the rejected loads information that a very high number of users were turned away from using the site either because they had an old permit or because they were not aware of the change to rules regarding double-axle trailers. The group was advised that the changes had been advertised on the Council's website and on site. However, letters were not sent to current users due to the corruption of addresses on the database. The group heard from site users that they did not feel that the communication had been sufficient, that the visual displays of change at the sites were not readily discernible or of sufficient size to enable ease of recognition and that the three month transition period given to the new changes was too short. This was further compounded by the change over being part way through the year in the winter, when many users do not use the recycling centres.

The group feels strongly that the communication of the changes to the CVT policy was not timely or sufficient. It was reported that users were unaware of the impending change and that any visual information on site should have been in a better format and capable of easy recognition and the change carried out at an appropriate time in the year cycle. It is considered that the use of the database was not effective to monitor customers or enable change communication. To enable the transition period the database should have been maintained and used effectively to allow information and correspondence to be sent out to current users.

**Recommendation 1: That any future changes to the permit system shall be clearly advertised to the general public - in an appropriate time frame to avoid confusion. This shall include the sending of a letter to all members of the public who are currently registered to the scheme. Dates of implementation shall be clearly identified and displayed in an appropriate format and an appropriate transition time shall be given for the changes.**

**Recommendation 2: That the database maintained by Worcestershire County Council be maintained effectively to ensure that communications can be sent out to current users regarding any changes to the system.**

5.3 The task and finish group were made aware of some problems regarding the sharing of data from Worcestershire County Council to Herefordshire Council and the Household Recycling Centres. The group thinks that it is imperative to ensure that all data is appropriately shared between all of the organisations and sites. This will allow for effective enforcement and the ability to identify any trends in complaints or refused loads.

**Recommendation 3: That Worcestershire County Council shares information maintained by them with Herefordshire Council and the Household Recycling Centre on a regular basis.**

**Recommendation 4: That Herefordshire Council appropriate staff have limited access to the database to enable update of Herefordshire users' details and sending of targeted messages and requests to Worcestershire Council.**

5.4 Information received from site operatives, users and observations from the Members on their visits to the sites identified that there was insufficient identifiable signage at the Household Recycling Centres. These varied from safety notices to ways in which people could dispose of their waste in different ways e.g. composting, to pictograms to inform customers without words. Furthermore the task and finish group feel that the work that is done by the waste team and operatives is not communicated enough. Herefordshire has excellent levels of recycling and the enforcement team work tirelessly to prosecute offenders and respond to fly tipping. The task and finish group feels that the statistics regarding all of these areas should be publicised more widely.

**Recommendation 5: That signage at the Household Recycling Centres shall be improved at all sites. The signage shall identify ways to use the site safely and appropriately; inform the public of help that is available from the operatives; pictograms to inform customers without words; to inform the users of recycling levels and ways in which waste was used; to inform users of other ways to reuse and recycle; and to inform users of any proposed changes to the scheme.**

**Recommendation 6: That communication about waste and enforcement activity should be improved significantly. This to be achieved by:**

- **Regular updates on waste i.e. recycling rates, changes to the system, enforcement action etc. to be distributed via ward updates to Ward and Parish Councillors**
- **Regular updates as above to be placed on the Council's website**

**Recommendation 7: That Herefordshire Council invests some time and resources to encouraging members of the public to consider other legal ways of dealing with their waste before bringing them to the Household Recycling Centres.**

**Recommendation 8: Composting should be further extensively advertised and encouraged as an important step for recycling for householders**

5.5 During interviews with various officers, operatives and service users, commendation was given for the enforcement team and in particular, Craig Sandman. The task and finish group are concerned by the radical reduction of staff in the community protection team and the likely effect that this will have on illegal dumping of trade waste and fly tipping. The group is also aware that Worcestershire County Council does not have any enforcement on their sites.

**Recommendation 9: That the enforcement function be enhanced to reduce the amount of trade waste entering sites and respond to fly tipping. Herefordshire**



**and Worcestershire councils should consider the joint resourcing of this function to share costs and utilise expertise.**

### The Survey

5.6 As part of this task and finish group, a site user survey was issued. The survey was advertised on Herefordshire Council's website, at Household Recycling Centres and distributed to Members via the Ward Member updates. The group received 324 responses to the survey, making it the most successful response to a scrutiny review since scrutiny was founded. The group would like to thank all of the users who responded and whose opinions have helped shape the recommendations contained within this review. The high response rate infers that users would like to have their say on the Household Recycling Centres. The Members of the task and finish group would therefore like to see this kind of survey to happen annually.

**Recommendation 10: That an annual site user survey be introduced. The timing should be varied every year to capture the views of all users; the database could make for the efficient information gathering in addition to website advertising and web survey.**

### The Household Recycling Centres

5.7 The task and finish group heard from site users via the survey, interviews and complaints about their views towards the Household Recycling Centres. The Members were also able to visit the Ledbury and Rotherwas Recycling Centres. The following key points were identified:

- That the amount of 12 permits per year was not sufficient. This was especially the case for people with large gardens. There was also some confusion as to how the permits could be used. Many members of the public thought that the permits had to be used once a month rather than whenever they are needed. The group feels that this number should be increased to 14 per year to allow for people with a large amount of green waste and also to avoid the confusion as to when they should be used.
- The group was very surprised to find that the largest Household Recycling Centre in Rotherwas did not have a green waste compactor. The group thinks that this should be provided for as soon as is practically possible but within three months.
- The layout of the sites means that they were not being used to their best potential. Many of the users only brought green waste so it would make sense for the sites to replicate this and have the green waste bins in a different place to help avoid congestion.
- There were a large number of complaints regarding the prohibiting of double-axle trailers on site. The group was advised that the reasons for prohibiting them were to discourage illegal disposal of trade waste and also due to the size and weight of these vehicles. The group heard from a number of site users who used to take their household waste to the sites on double-axle trailers. These trailers are expensive items to buy and they also

allow for fewer trips to the household recycling centres. The group feels that this rule is an arbitrary one that is affecting legitimate users to the site and may also have an impact on the amount of congestion. Therefore the group is recommending that double-axle trailers be allowed onto the site. The double-axle trailers shall be to the Lfor Williams double-axle trailer dimensions.

- The group was concerned that the prohibition of disposing of waste from certain types of vehicle, with no special circumstances allowed, may restrict some protected groups from within Herefordshire who do not have access to regular cars. One example given was when a member from the travelling community only had a vehicle which was in the list of prohibited vehicles. They were turned away from the site despite having no access to any other type of vehicle.
- There are a large number of vehicles which are not contained within the Commercial Vehicle/Trailer Permit Policy. The group were given examples of these vehicles being turned away in some instances and allowed on in others. The group feels that there should be an exhaustive list of prohibited vehicles and that the scheme should be fluid enough to allow for other vehicles to be added to the list when necessary. However, the permission for horse boxes and similarly sized and capacity vehicles, not currently mentioned in the CVT, should be specifically restricted. The group feels that there should be an exhaustive list of prohibited vehicles and that the scheme should be fluid enough to allow for other vehicles to be added to the list when necessary.
- The group heard that any recommendation not allowing different vehicles onto the site may result in the increase of illegal waste tipping. Thus may also lead to an increase of the need for the Community Protection Team to take up investigations and subsequent enforcement action. The group was advised that Wednesdays are generally a quiet day on the sites. Therefore the group is recommending that Wednesdays, at specified times, is specifically given as a day when regulated exceptions to the prohibited vehicles are allowed access to the Rotherwas site. This would also allow for targeted enforcement.
- The group was advised by site operatives that there was a large difference in usage of the sites between Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer. The group feels that the sites should replicate the demand and encourage site users to use the sites at differing times during the Spring/Summer months to avoid congestion. Therefore the group is recommending that the sites close earlier during the Autumn/Winter months and later during the Spring/Summer months. This could be trialled in the first instance to see how it would be received. There should also be sufficient communication of this change.
- The group are concerned that there is no facility on sites to allow for an emergency permit to be given in certain circumstances. Examples of these circumstances might be when there has been a death and the house has to be cleared out immediately or alternatively when there has been a case of flooding.

- The group would like to see more opportunities for the re-use of further brought in items where unwanted household and garden items could be recycled for free at the household recycling centres e.g. furniture, water based paints and textiles etc.; thus cutting down on waste disposal and enabling community recycling. This was mirrored in the responses of the site user surveys
- A number of site users raised the query regarding the need for another site North of Hereford. The group feels that this shall become even more significant when the next phases of housing developments are built. Therefore the group is recommending that research is undertaken to determine the viability of opening another household recycling centre north of Hereford.
- Overall the feedback from users was of the excellent work that the site operatives do. The group was pleased to hear from Severn Waste of the training that the operatives undertake. However, the group feels that there is the need for specific training to be given on conflict management in order for the site operatives to deal with site users who may be challenging.
- The group considered that where changes could be made within Herefordshire, albeit unilaterally, to enable better and more efficient use of the Household Transfer Sites by the council tax payers then every effort should be made to make this service more effective.

**Recommendation 11: That the number of permits per user is increased to 14 a year.**

**Recommendation 12: That a green waste compactor is provided at the Rotherwas Household Recycling Centre within three months.**

**Recommendation 13: That the site layouts of all Herefordshire Household Recycling Centres are revised to ensure maximum effective usage and safety.**

**Recommendation 14: That double-axle trailer of the current Ifor Williams dimensions shall be allowed to enter on the sites. Consideration should be given to only allowing their access on specific days.**

**Recommendation 15: That consideration is given to allowing vehicles outside of the permit system from some protected groups from within Herefordshire who do not have access to 'regular' cars an opportunity to dispose of their waste on specific days.**

**Recommendation 16: That Wednesday should be designated as the formal day for vehicle types outside of the permit scheme, as mentioned within this report, to dispose of their waste.**

**Recommendation 17: That the vehicle and trailer types defined in the Commercial Vehicle/Trailer Permit Policy are reviewed to consider all different types of vehicles which may enter the site.**

**Recommendation 18:** That a review is undertaken to identify operating a blend of opening hours at the Herefordshire sites. This shall include later opening hours in Spring/Summer and earlier closing hours in Autumn/Winter.

**Recommendation 19:** That consideration should be given to allowing one-off emergency permits to be issued on site.

**Recommendation 20:** That consideration shall be given to providing facilities to enable the re-use of brought in items at the Household Recycling Centres e.g. furniture, water based paints and textiles etc.; thus cutting down on waste disposal and enabling community recycling.

**Recommendation 21:** That research should be undertaken to determine the viability of a north Hereford Household Recycling Centre in view of the increased housing numbers coming forward.

**Recommendation 22:** That specific training shall be given to site operatives on conflict management and dispute resolution.

**Recommendation 23:** That where Herefordshire Council are able to make identified changes to service, especially unilaterally, that these be carried out.

## **6 Other Matters Considered**

6.1 The task and finish group considered whether it would be possible for householder(s) who are elderly or disabled to have their garden waste removed to the household waste station by a community warden, housing association or as a community service authorised by the parish council etc. However, under The Waste (Household Waste) Duty of Care (England & Wales) Regulations 2005, householders have a duty of care and are required to take reasonable measures to ensure that household waste produced on their property, if not directly taken by them to the transfer station, is passed onto an authorised person who is an authorised waste carrier for transfer. Therefore, it was not possible to recommend this method of community disposal as an option.

## **7 Summary of Recommendations**

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**Recommendation 2:** That the database maintained by Worcestershire County Council be maintained effectively to ensure that communications can be sent out to current users regarding any changes to the system.

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## **8. Appendices**

8.1 Appendix A – Scoping Statement

Appendix B – Herefordshire Household Recycling Centres Site User Survey