

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment
Date:	27 January 2022
Title:	Household Waste Recycling Centres Booking System
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the booking system that has been in place at all Hampshire Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) since June 2020, and to recommend the retention of the system indefinitely in recognition of the clear benefits that it has brought for operational and customer demand reasons.

Recommendations

2. That the Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment notes the continued operational benefits that have been demonstrated by the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) booking system, and the level of public satisfaction.
3. That the Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment approves the retention of the booking system indefinitely at all Hampshire County Council managed HWRCs to support the management of customer demand and operational processes.

Executive Summary

4. This paper seeks to:
 - set out the context for why the booking system was initially introduced;
 - outline the operational benefits that the booking system has brought;
 - highlight the positive reaction it has received from the Hampshire public; and
 - recommend the retention of the booking system indefinitely at all Hampshire HWRCs.

Contextual information

5. Hampshire County Council reopened the HWRC network on Monday 11 May 2020, following a period of enforced closure during the national Covid-19

lockdown from 24 March 2020, in response to central Government and industry pressure for sites to reopen. New social distancing measures and operational procedures were introduced at all sites to protect both the general public and contractors, who operate and service the sites, from contracting the virus. To manage demand and address significant congestion issues seen around most sites, a booking system was implemented from 15 June 2020.

6. Despite some initial challenges created predominantly by excessive demand, the booking system has proved to be very successful. The severe queuing outside HWRCs was eliminated and allowed the additional traffic management and site security that was required to be removed which significantly reduced the additional cost of service provision. Through close analysis of data and on-site observations, the number of slots available per half hour at every site were able to be gradually increased and adapted based on each site's individual profile such that capacity could be maximised within the parameters of any restrictions in place at the time. A number of unsolicited compliments have been received from members of the public who find the booking system more convenient and a better customer experience.
7. The success of the vaccination programme during the summer of 2021 was a cornerstone behind the Government's Roadmap to implement relaxed measures while continuing to control the virus. This allowed all HWRCs in Hampshire to facilitate an increase in capacity back towards pre-COVID levels, with around 72,000 slots bookable per week countywide by the end of the summer.
8. Despite the continued success of the vaccination programme, the Government has repeatedly advised that the virus continues to circulate in society and that there remained a possibility for some restrictions to return during Winter 2021/22. It was therefore agreed in June 2021 that the booking system should stay in place at Hampshire HWRCs until at least March 2022 should some form of social distancing be required in the short to medium term or on an ad-hoc basis in the future.
9. The booking system has demonstrated that managing customer throughput is an effective means of enabling the HWRCs to operate more efficiently. Congestion has historically been commonplace at many HWRCs on busy weekends throughout the year and public holidays, which created delays on the local road network and increased vehicle emissions from idling cars queuing. Booking a slot enables residents to plan with confidence that they can deposit their waste swiftly and easily. Many similar authorities already have or are actively considering retaining their systems more permanently or implementing one based on the success of authorities like Hampshire. It should be noted that Southampton City Council has opted to remove the system on a trial basis for three months from 27 December 2021 to evaluate the impact. The outputs of the trial period will be closely monitored, including any discernible increase in patronage (in terms of numbers of visitors and throughput of materials) at nearby county council sites.

Finance

10. The booking system is an external product which is currently provided on a hired contractual basis. To date, the cost to the County Council has been

around £20,000 per six months, which was funded through corporate Covid response funding. As the external provider simultaneously works with a number of other authorities in a similar position to Hampshire, the County Council has reaped the benefit of progressive service enhancements and developments suggested by its fellow authorities. If the booking system is retained, as proposed, it will become a standard operating cost and be funded using existing resources.

11. Hampshire County Council's IT Services department is presently commencing a project to ascertain the potential for a booking service to be hosted internally on its website (Hantsweb) as opposed to hiring an external product. As part of this project, consideration will be given to investigating the possibility of integrating the booking system with other internally hosted systems such as vehicle registration for Hampshire residents and the van/trailer permit scheme. A possible solution could be a hybrid approach whereby an external product is procured but integrated into the Council's own systems. A further possible outcome is that an externally sourced, stand-alone booking system could be identified as the most efficient option. Detailed evaluation of the estimated costs and development implications will be conducted to determine the best value option for the medium to long term. A short-term extension of the existing external contract may also be required to retain a seamless transition. Initial costs will be met from existing ETE resources, and it is anticipated that any short-term costs will be absorbed by long-term operational efficiencies.
12. While the large majority of residents use the online portal to book their slot, and this will continue to be encouraged as the quickest and easiest option, it is recognised that a minority of residents do not have access to online services. A telephone booking service has therefore been provided to assist those residents, and this will continue to be required if the booking system is retained.
13. The booking system has delivered significant efficiencies in terms of site operations through reduced queuing and associated disruption to local traffic, as well as managing throughput to enable minimum disruption to site users during bin servicing and maintenance.

Performance

14. Since the booking system was introduced in June 2020, more than three million bookings have been made countywide by residents. The vast majority of these (96-97%) have been booked using the online web portal which enables customers to locate a convenient time at their preferred site and book a slot quickly and easily.
15. A number of unsolicited compliments have been received for the booking system. Common themes cited include satisfaction with how quick and easy it is to access the HWRC and deposit waste items efficiently, confidence that a long queue will not be encountered to enter the site, and the associated positive impacts on reducing congestion on the local road network and less air pollution. For some residents, there is an additional wellbeing aspect as they consider that the booking system has made their visit to the HWRC a more pleasant and less daunting experience than before.

Consultation and Equalities

16. A satisfaction survey was undertaken with all customers that had booked a slot between November and December 2021. More than 25,000 responses were received, and results indicated that 89.9% were satisfied or very satisfied with the booking experience, and 78.4% supported continued use of a booking system in the future. This is corroborated by a number of unsolicited compliments on the system, of which nine were received between July and October 2021, and similar surveys undertaken externally.
17. Retention of the booking system has a neutral impact on all protected characteristics because it does not alter the actual service provided. It arguably has an indirect positive impact in some cases (e.g. disability) as the consistent throughput enables greater assistance to be provided than if the site is overly crowded.
18. A telephone service is also offered for those residents who are unable to book their slot online. Around 3-4% of all bookings are made by telephone. While online booking remains the quickest and simplest means of booking, ongoing provision of this service mitigates against any indirect negative impact on those residents with protected characteristics.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

19. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

Climate Change Adaptation

20. The adaptation project screening tool considers vulnerability of proposals to the effects of climate change and whether any adaptations are required. A full assessment of climate change vulnerability was not completed in this instance as the initial vulnerability assessment indicated that the project is at minimal risk from climate vulnerabilities.

Carbon Mitigation

21. The mitigation decision-making tool considers the impact of carbon emissions and whether any mitigations are required. Recycling and reuse activity produces fewer carbon emissions than waste disposal, so maximising recycling and reuse has clear carbon benefits. The overall aim of the HWRC service is to minimise landfill where possible and therefore reuse, recycling and recovery actions will always be prioritised in line with the waste hierarchy. Retention of the booking system has contributed to a further reduction in carbon emissions by reducing queuing with idling engines outside HWRCs and spreading customer demand across the day/week.

Conclusions

22. The booking system, while initially a COVID response to facilitate a safe passage through the sites whilst social distancing restrictions were enforced, has proved to be operationally sound and popular with the public. It allows site staff to plan operational activities with confidence, while the public can book a slot at their nearest site at a convenient time, safe in the knowledge that they will be able to attend the site efficiently and not wait in a queue to get in.
23. It is therefore recommended that the booking system is retained indefinitely at Hampshire HWRCs to continue supporting a good standard of customer service and allowing for the swift reintroduction of restrictions should it be required in response to a further wave of the pandemic. It is further recommended that investigations are conducted to determine the feasibility of integrating the booking system with existing online forms to enhance the customer experience.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u> Household Waste Recycling Centre Operations	<u>Date</u> 17/06/21
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

Retention of the booking system has a neutral impact on all protected characteristics because it does not alter the service provided. It arguably has an indirect positive impact in some cases (e.g., disability) as the consistent throughput enables greater assistance to be provided than if the site is overly crowded.