

**KEY DECISION BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WASTE AND
RECYCLING**

**Originating Officer: Jason Searles, Head of Waste and
Recycling
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Purpose of Report

It is proposed to implement changes to the scope and operation of the Recycling Centre for Household Waste Service (RCHW) by amending the opening hours of the sites and the number of sites operated by ECC.

These proposed changes have been developed following analysis of RCHW sites which has demonstrated reductions in tonnage throughput/service usage and increases in operational capacity under the current operating model. The proposed service changes will reduce service overlap between RCHW sites and improve service efficiency, whilst maintaining service access across the County

Key Decision:

I have made the following decisions in relation to the operation and provision of the RCHW service:

- Close the following two RCHW sites
 - Mill Lane, High Ongar
 - Colchester Road, St Osyth
- Amend the opening hours of all remaining 21 RCHW sites
 - Open the sites at 09:00 as opposed to the current 08:00
 - Cease the provision of late night Tuesday opening (17:00 – 19:00) which currently operates from May to August
- To reduce the opening days of the following 9 sites from the current 7 days a week (all sites would remain open on Saturdays and Sundays)
 - Burnham on Crouch to operate 4 days a week
 - Chigwell to operate 5 days a week
 - Dovercourt to operate 5 days a week
 - Kirby Le Soken to operate 5 days a week
 - Lawford to operate 5 days a week
 - South Woodham Ferrers to operate 5 days a week
 - Waltham Abbey to operate 5 days a week
 - Moutnessing to operate 6 days a week
 - Witham to operate 6 days a week

- To adjust the opening days of the West Mersea site from the current 2 full days and 4 half days a week, to 4 full days

Signature	Date
Cabinet Member	

Background, context, and area of the County affected

As a Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), Essex County Council has a statutory duty under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to:

- Provide places at which persons resident in its area may deposit their household waste
- Ensure such places are reasonably accessible
- Ensure such places are available at all reasonable times (this must include at least a period of time on a Saturday or Sunday)
- Ensure each place is available for the deposit of waste free of charge

Essex County Council exceeds its statutory WDA duty through the provision of a network of 23 RCHW sites located throughout the County. With the exception of one site (which due to planning restriction operates 6 days a week) the RCHW sites currently open to the public 7 days a week; operating an average of 65hrs a week in the summer months and 56hrs a week in the winter months.

The location of the RCHW sites within Essex has developed over a number of years primarily as a result of historical land use factors. This approach has led to

- sites being unevenly distributed across the County
- the size and/or footprint of sites being inconsistent with current and emerging operational demands
- sites being located within relatively close proximity of each other compromising service efficiency

In the past the RCHW facilities have been the only option for Essex householders wishing to recycle certain household waste types. In recent years however the District and Borough Councils, in their capacity as Waste Collection Authorities (WCA) have significantly extended their recycling services offerings. The speed of change in recycling services has accelerated following the adoption of the Inter-Authority Agreements which include an agreement by the County Council to provide financial support to partner WCAs in their expansion of recycling collection services.

The expansion of WCA recycling has led to increased service duplication with the RCHW service. Kerbside collections are more convenient for residents and as a result there has been a net reduction in usage of the RCHW services. Since 2006/07 there has been a reduction in material being taken to the RCHW sites of over 9%.

The RCHW service is a countywide service; all sites are available for use by residents of any County Division. As all sites will be affected to greater or lesser extent by the adoption of these proposals this decision will have an impact across all County Divisions.

Options and Proposals

The options were developed following analysis and study of annual tonnage throughput at the RCHW sites, visitor numbers by site, site density within Essex, site capacity (tonnage and user) and analysis of the waste and recycling services provided at the kerbside by the Waste Collection Authority.

Analysis demonstrated that the use of sites as highlighted by the household tonnage throughput had collectively fallen by over 9% since 2006/07 and by over 20% at some sites. In addition the provision of services at the kerbside had dramatically expanded over the last few years both in terms of areas covered and materials collected. This has reduced the frequency and need for some residents to visit the RCHW. The analysis of site usage also highlighted that many sites for large parts of the working day or week had relatively low usage.

The proposals flowing from this assessment demonstrated that from an operational perspective the waste handled by the 23 RCHW sites could be accommodated in significantly fewer sites (possibly as few as 10) operating restricted hours. This option however was not fully explored and was rejected as the location of the current sites would have meant a requirement on users to travel significant distances to access sites.

The options developed, as detailed earlier, have been based on:

- 1) maximising the retention of RCHW sites and amending opening hours so they better matched current and projected usage patterns
- 2) reducing the number of sites only where sites are in close proximity and the retained site has the capacity to manage additional usage

Although the operating costs of individual sites were also looked at, this was not a material consideration in developing the proposals but was used to ensure that any financial savings delivered through service changes were properly reflected within the contractual arrangements with the site operators.

Conclusions

Use of the RCHW service by Essex residents has declined over recent years as a result of increased use of kerbside collection services and an overall reduction in household waste. The continued investment in kerbside collection services by the County Council and WCAs is likely to result in this trend continuing into the future.

Whilst service usage has declined, the capacity of the RCHW service has increased. Although the number of RCHW sites in Essex has been broadly static in the last decade (increasing in 2004 from 22 to the current 23 sites); the waste handling and site visitor capacity of the service has increased significantly as a result of the development of replacement sites or upgrading of existing facilities. This has led to an over-scaled service which operates in at a sub-optimum level of efficiency.

The combination of the operational changes identified will reverse the current situation regarding service efficiency by reducing the overall capacity of the service so that it is more closely aligned to the current and projected usage levels. Although the closure of sites and reduced opening days will impact on those using sites

affected, the adverse impact will be minimised by ensuring other sites within the local area are available for use.

The two sites identified for closure are in close proximity to a neighbouring site. The St Osyth RCHW is less than 4 miles from the Clacton facility whilst High Ongar RCHW is less than 6 miles from the facility located in Brentwood.

Flexibility within current and future contractual arrangements for the operation of the sites combined with the retention of St Osyth and High Ongar sites provides the service with the ability to accommodate future unexpected growth within the service.

Relevance to ECC's Corporate Plan and Other Strategic Plans

Delivering value for money is a key EssexWorks priority. The delivery of the changes proposed will result in a more focused and streamlined service which is still able to meet the needs of users. These changes will reduce the overall service revenue costs but will ensure the service is still able to handle the customer and waste volume throughput, thus increasing overall efficiency and value for money.

The delivery of high levels of recycling is a key priority of the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS) and is also an EssexWorks priority. It is not felt that these changes will result in any significant reductions in waste recycling performance as users will still have reasonable levels of access to recycling services via the RCHW as well as the enhanced kerbside recycling services.

Internal and External Consultation

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Waste and Recycling has been involved in the development of these service options.

As part of the development of the proposals a consultation period was entered into with site staff, via the two contractors operating the sites, this has taken place over a 13 week period to ensure all views could be considered. The feedback received has been incorporated into the final decision to ensure that the RCHW operation as a whole can continue to provide the required levels of service in a safe and efficient manner.

All District and Borough Councils, town and parish councils, County Council Members and Members of Parliament have been informed of the proposed changes and invited to submit their views. The proposals were also widely distributed enabling members of the public and service users to directly submit their views on the proposed changes for consideration. In addition meetings have taken place with all of the parish councils within the areas affected by the proposed two site closures.

Discussions have also taken place via the Inter Authority Agreement Officer and Members Working Groups consisting of the lead waste officer and Member from all 12 District and Borough Councils

Details of the proposals have also been discussed with members of the Economic Development, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee. Issues raised related to maintaining high levels of public accessibility to waste facilities and ensuring capacity within the service to manage the number of users and the amount of waste requiring disposal.

The issues raised and views received through the internal and external consultations undertaken have been used to finalise the service proposals.

Appendix 1 summarises the issues raised by those that have responded to the notification of the proposed changes.

Legal Implications

Essex County Council is a Waste Disposal Authority (WDA) as defined by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and has a number of statutory duties relating to the provision of sites for residents to dispose of household waste;

The changes proposed to the RCHW service will leave a service of sufficient scale and operational scope to comply with the Council's statutory requirements as a WDA.

The Inter Authority Agreement with the WCAs are legally binding documents which set out the services provided by the Council with a commitment to maintain those service levels. Although changes are permitted these need to go through a review process to ascertain whether they have any prejudicial impact on the Essex Waste Partnership or individual members of the Partnership. If impacts are identified there will need to be a process of identifying mitigation measures or compensation. The changes proposed will, once finalised, need to go through the IAA service review process. Any changes to the inter authority arrangements or other contractual arrangements may have financial implications and these will need to be considered prior to finalising any such changes.

Finance and Resources Implications

The driver in implementing the proposed changes is to deliver greater service efficiency and increase value for money, in light of investment made by the County Council in WCA kerbside collection schemes which have led to a reduced usage of the RCHW service.

The changes proposed will therefore result in a reduced revenue service cost for the operation of the sites. The changes proposed will deliver a minimum saving of £650,000 p.a

The anticipated saving across the various service changes is detailed below,

- opening 1 hour later in the morning and discontinuing the late night Tuesday opening - £250,000
- reducing the opening days of 10 sites - £180,000
- closure of two sites – £220,000

Human Resources Implications

These proposed service changes have no implications for ECC human resource allocations.

All staff working on the RCHW sites are employed by the two contractors that operate these sites on behalf of ECC. A separate staff consultation programme has been undertaken by the two contractors with the relevant unions representing staff.

Equality Impact Assessment

An equality impact assessment has been undertaken into the service provided at the Recycling Centres for Household Waste and this process has been used to identify

any impacts resulting from the proposed changes to the service and, if present, ways in which these can be mitigated.

The assessment undertaken has identified no significant equality impacts as a result of the changes being proposed to the service.

APPENDIX 1

Recycling Centre for Household Waste Issues and Responses

Following the announcement of the proposed changes to the Recycling Centre for Household Waste (RCHW) service in early July 2011 a period of consultation was entered into. This allowed contractors, site staff and service users to raise any concerns, issues or alternative options for consideration before changes were implemented.

Detailed below are a summary of the issues and concerns raised together with the response of Essex County Council.

1. Why is Essex County Council closing RCHW sites and reducing opening hours when we are being told we need to recycle more?

Over the next four years, central government funding will fall significantly as the coalition government tackles the national deficit. Like all councils, Essex has to find significant savings; this will require us to take some difficult decisions to ensure we focus our resources correctly to enable us to deliver the best possible value for money service to Essex residents.

Essex County Council currently provides 23 RCHW sites across the County, many of these sites were established during a time when the waste management services provided by your local District or Borough Council were very different. Over the last few years Essex County Council has worked closely with the Essex District and Borough Councils and provided funding to help expand the scale and scope of kerbside recycling service.

An impact of the kerbside recycling service expansion is that the amount of waste taken to the recycling centres has fallen in recent years as the need and frequency of visit to these facilities has declined. Over the last four years the amount of waste taken to the 23 RCHW sites has fallen by almost 10% and at some sites by over 20%. This reduction in waste throughput coupled with the need to make savings has led us to review whether there is a more efficient way to provide this service.

Although it is recognised that some users of the RCHW service will be inconvenienced by these changes it is felt that on balance the coverage provided by 21 sites across the county coupled with the expanded kerbside collection services will ensure Essex householders have the necessary opportunities to recycle and dispose of their waste appropriately.

2. Reducing the number of RCHW sites from 23 to 21 and reducing the operational hours of the remaining RCHW sites will lead to an increase in fly tipping of waste by Essex householders?

Fly tipping, the illegal tipping of waste on public or private land, is a criminal offence, the reasons individuals fly tip waste are varied and complex.

In many cases waste material that is fly tipped is commercial waste, this is done to avoid the cost of disposal. As the Essex RCHW facilities are not licensed to accept commercial waste any RCHW service change implemented should have no impact on the incidence of commercial waste fly tipping.

Although the availability and accessibility of RCHW facilities can impact on the level of household waste fly tipping, an increase in this activity is generally only seen when users

have no viable alternative option to dispose of their waste. Implementation of the changes will retain 21 RCHW sites in Essex of which over half will be open 7 days a week and all (with the exception of West Mersea which is constrained by planning conditions) will be open at weekends when the sites are in most demand.

When Essex County Council have closed recycling centres in the past, the most recent in 2009, there has been no noticeable impact on the incidence of fly tipping within the local area.

To reduce the likelihood of fly tipping following any service changes Essex County Council will ensure adequate levels of information are provided to users leading up to any changes detailing where alternative facilities are located. In addition gate staff will be used for a period of time at any closed sites to direct users to alternative facilities. Resources will also be made available to ensure sites are monitored, waste left at sites is promptly cleared and where necessary enforcement action is taken.

3. Instead of closing sites why don't you reduce the opening days of all sites this would share the impact of service reductions equally across Essex and would be fairer?

This approach was considered however a reduction across all RCHW sites takes no consideration of the differing levels of use of these facilities and the level of available capacity.

Some RCHW sites cover very large areas and already operate at close to full capacity, reducing the operating hours of these sites would mean unacceptable levels of queuing to access the facility and may lead to fly tipping

The range of options selected ensure RCHW service as a whole continues to provide reasonable levels of accessibility to all residents whilst ensuring the sites can operate effectively.

4. On what basis have the sites at St Osyth and High Ongar been selected for closure?

The sites identified for closure have both seen significant falls in tonnage throughout over the last few years and are in close proximity to neighbouring sites that have the spare capacity to handle additional users. This combination of factors means that savings and efficiencies can be delivered by combining activity on one site whilst minimising the adverse impact on users.

With regard to site proximity the site at St Osyth is less than 4 miles distance from the next available site at Clacton, whilst the site at High Ongar is less than 6 miles from Brentwood; although depending on where users are travelling from many be closer to the Mountnessing site.

5. What will happen to RCHW sites once they are closed?

Both of the RCHW sites identified for closure are owned by Essex County Council and will in the immediate term be retained for storage purposes to further improve waste service provision.

6. Many people would be willing to pay to access a local site rather than travel to a neighbouring one. Why don't you charge users a small amount to use the site?

The County Council cannot legally charge householders to dispose of household waste at RCHW sites.

Although some recycling centres in other parts of the country do charge to dispose of household waste however these are operated by commercial organisations or charities rather than County Councils.

Recently other County Councils who have closed recycling centres have leased the land on which the facilities are located to parish councils or other interested bodies who have set up recycling and waste facilities which charge users a fee to access. Essex is willing to hold discussion with groups who may be interested in such an approach for the sites that have been selected for closure

7. Will the retained sites be able to cope with the additional users and what will happen when new properties are built in the area?

The tonnage trend at the RCHW sites over the last few years has been one of declining throughput; this together with analysis of current service capacity indicates that the provision of 21 facilities will be able to handle the number of visitors to the sites and the amount of waste.

The demands on the RCHW service are however constantly reviewed to ensure capacity exists now and in the future. The contractual arrangements we have in place will enable us to increase opening hours in areas where increased development is putting pressure on the service. In addition the retention of closed sites will enable us to bring these back into service in the future if needed.

8. The sites in Essex are already very busy and I often have to queue won't these changes make it worse?

All of our sites will get busy at various times which may mean users have to queue. This is particularly noticeable when the containers on site are being emptied or when lots of people use the sites on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. However outside of these times the sites are much quieter and the likelihood of queuing is much reduced.

We will be ensuring site users are better informed of the best times to visit sites to reduce the need to queue, we will also be changing the layout on some sites to better manage the traffic flows on site and reduce the time you need to spend at the centres. At some sites it is unfortunately necessary to close the site when containers are being emptied; we are however working with our contractors to reduce the number of times when this has to take place during opening hours.