

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 13 March 2025.

PRESENT	Councillors Matthew Beaver (Chair) Councillors Ian Hollidge, Eleanor Kirby-Green, Philip Lunn, Wendy Maples (substituting for Councillor Julia Hilton), Steve Murphy, Paul Redstone, Stephen Shing and Brett Wright
LEAD MEMBERS	Councillors Nick Bennett, Penny di Cara and Claire Dowling
ALSO PRESENT	Rupert Clubb, Director of Communities, Economy and Transport Karl Taylor, Assistant Director - Operations Justin Foster, Waste Team Manager
OTHER COUNCILLORS IN ATTENDANCE VIRTUALLY	Councillor Bob Bowdler Councillor Anne Cross

27. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

27.1 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2024 as a correct record.

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

28.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chris Collier, Julia Hilton (Councillor Wendy Maples substituted) and David Tutt.

29. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

29.1 Councillor Maples declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 as she is a member of Lewes District Council and the East Sussex Fire Authority. Councillor Stephen

Shing declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 as he is a member of Wealden District Council and the East Sussex Fire Authority. Councillor Redstone declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 as he is a member the East Sussex Fire Authority.

30. URGENT ITEMS

30.1 There were no urgent items.

31. CALL-IN: DECISION MADE BY THE LEAD MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT REGARDING THE PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION OF A BOOKING SYSTEM AT HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING SITES

31.1 The Chair introduced the report and outlined that its purpose was to allow the Committee to consider the call-in in relation to the decision by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment regarding the Proposed Implementation of a booking system at Household Waste Recycling Sites (HWRS).

31.2 The Committee considered the call-in and the information contained in the report. A summary of the questions raised, and comments made is given below.

Process for using HWRS sites under the new booking system

31.3 The Committee asked how a site user's experience of using a HWRS site would change with the introduction of a booking system.

31.4 The Waste Team Manager outlined that the reason a booking system had been proposed was not just to address congestion and queuing at some sites, but also to improve operational efficiency and customer experience, as well as contributing to the financial savings the Council had to make. The change in site users' experience would be that before going to a HWRS site, a person would have to book a 30 minute slot online. Slots can be booked up to 2 weeks in advance and could also be booked on the day. This would ensure residents would have a good experience of using a HWRS as they would be less congested and site staff would be more available to provide assistance if needed.

31.5 The Committee asked if the online booking system would be an app or another type of software and whether there would be telephone access to the booking system. The Waste Team Manager responded that there will be a link to a website for people to book slots. People will also be able to book by telephone through a call centre if they are not able to access the website. It will also be possible for people to book a slot on behalf of a resident.

Public consultation responses

31.6 Committee members observed that the public consultation on the introduction of a booking system had a 92% feedback that residents did not want a booking system and asked why the proposals were going ahead.

31.7 The Waste Team Manager acknowledged the high response rate to the consultation and the negative feedback. This was taken into account, but on balance it was considered that the proposal should go ahead on the basis of the multiple benefits in terms of customer experience and operational efficiency, and the need to make savings. The Waste Team Manager added that many of the HWRS sites were seeing an increase in the number of visits and, although site staff did their best to check and assist anyone using the site, the new booking system will help

site staff support site visitors. He outlined that it was not possible to have a partial booking system that only covered some sites for the reasons set out in the Lead Member report, and it was better to have a consistent policy for all sites across the county.

Planned savings from introducing a booking system

31.8 The Committee asked how the proposed implementation of a booking system would save £50,000 and how long it would take to pay back the set up and running costs. The Waste Team Manager outlined that the introduction of a booking system would save £50,000 after set-up and running costs have been taken into account and this was a conservative estimate. The costs of setting up and operating the booking system had been included in the financial modelling based on thorough estimates of the costs. The Council will pay for the set-up costs and the savings figure in the Lead Member report was net of the set up and running costs.

31.9 The Waste Team Manager clarified that the savings would primarily come from a reduction in the amount of waste and the deterrent to traders bringing their waste to HWRS sites. There would also be a saving from out of area residents' use of sites and the ability to levy a charge for their use of the sites.

Traders' use of HWRS

31.10 Councillor Shing asked for clarification about traders' use of sites. The Waste Team Manager clarified that traders cannot use HWRS sites, and they have to pay to dispose of their commercial waste. However, there are arrangements in place for residents who have trailers or vans to use sites on specific days of the week and on one day at the weekend, to dispose of their domestic waste.

31.11 Councillor Shing observed that the definition of trade waste can be difficult and stopping traders using sites may not be possible. The Waste Team Manager acknowledged that trade waste can be hard to identify, but the system will help staff track and monitor suspicious patterns of use and help identify people who may be depositing trade waste. Councillor Wright asked if there were other systems that could be used to identify suspicious patterns of use. The Waste Team Manager responded that it is a problem that authorities struggle with, and the Team works with Veolia on this if staff have suspicions about particular users. However, the booking system would provide a much clearer picture of use.

Potential increase in fly-tipping

31.12 Some Committee members raised concerns that the proposals would lead to an increase in fly-tipping and may also have an impact on the Fire Service which has to deal with hazardous fly-tips and fires involving fly-tipped waste. As well as national increases in fly-tipping, it was reported that both Kent and West Sussex County Councils had seen an increase in fly-tipping (e.g. large scale fly-tipping on wildlife sites). The Committee asked what evidence there was that the introduction of a booking system in these areas was not linked to an increase in fly-tipping.

31.13 The Waste Team Manager responded that the evidence in the report states that introducing a booking system will not lead to an increase in fly-tipping. Around half the local authority areas in the country use a booking system and they have not been the cause of the 6% increase in fly-tipping nationally in the last year. The large scale fly-tipping of bulk waste by criminal gangs is a different issue and not linked to the disposal of residents' domestic waste which is the service under consideration. The evidence suggests the introduction of a booking system will not turn residents into fly-tippers.

31.14 The Director of CET added that the bulk fly-tipping of waste is not a new problem, but this is not large scale fly-tipping of residents' waste and therefore it is not possible to draw a comparison between this and managing residents' waste efficiently.

31.15 Councillor Maples commented that in her experience as the Portfolio holder for Waste and Recycling at Lewes District Council, fly-tipping was not limited to criminal gangs and

residents did also fly-tip waste. She asked if officers had researched the amount of household waste that was fly-tipped before and after the introduction of a booking system in Kent and West Sussex as figures from the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) would suggest that there had been an increase in fly-tipping nationally.

31.16 The Waste Team Manager outlined that the evidence received from West Sussex and Kent was that the introduction of their booking systems had not led to an increase in fly-tipping. Also, the changes made in the ESCC 2018 Waste Service review which closed sites and introduced charges for some types of waste had not led to an increase in fly-tipping despite concerns at the time. This had been closely monitored by the Waste Team working with the District and Borough councils. The Waste Team Manager was confident that the introduction of a booking system would not lead to an increase in fly-tipping and highlighted that East Sussex already had a low rate of fly-tipping compared to regional and national figures. The Director of CET added that the Place Scrutiny Committee could consider the issue of fly-tipping as part of its future work programme.

Queuing at sites

31.17 Some Committee members commented that there did not appear to be a problem with queuing at sites, with some busier than others, and that there were other systems such as Parkopedia which could be adapted to help with queuing. The Waste Team Manager reiterated that the reasons for introducing a booking system were not limited to tackling queuing and congestion, but also about providing benefits for residents through operational efficiencies and cost savings. He stated that he was not aware of the Parkopedia app but was happy to have a look at it and its capabilities. The Director of Communities, Economy and Transport (CET) added that the proposal for a booking system is not just about queuing, but also about making a contribution to the difficult set of financial circumstances the Council faces. The desire is to improve services for residents, tackle queuing and provide financial and efficiency benefits.

Equalities Impact Assessment (EQiA)

31.18 Some Committee members observed that the Equalities Impact Assessment (EQiA) looked at the impact of introducing the booking system on people with protected characteristics such as age and disability, but in addition to this, one in eight people in East Sussex do not have access to a vehicle to get to a HWRS site and rely on friends and family to take waste to the tip. There are also those who are financially disadvantaged who cannot afford charges for bulky waste schemes and garden/green waste bins.

31.19 The Waste Team Manager outlined that the issue of residents without access to a vehicle had been addressed in the department's response to the call-in and they will not be disadvantaged by the booking system which will be designed to allow friends or family members to book slots on their behalf. The Director of CET added the booking system will be simple and easy to use and will help HWRS operatives spend more time with users who might need assistance. He highlighted examples of the benefits of booking systems and that residents in Kent and West Sussex did not want to see the booking system withdrawn once it had been introduced.

31.20 Councillor Hollidge commented that in regard to the EQiA, many older people do have access to IT and use apps to access services and this should not be a barrier to introducing a booking system. He also requested the department consider bicycle access to HWRS sites.

Booking system operation

31.21 The Committee asked what would happen if friends or relatives had booked a slot on behalf of someone else and they were late for their slot. The Committee also asked about the policy if a resident arrived late for their slot. The Waste Team Manager responded that the Waste team will look at how other authorities handle this and measures to deal with this can be

included in the design of the system. He added that the implementation and policies for the new booking system have been delegated to the Director of CET and the Waste Teams would develop a policy for late arrivals and 'no shows' as part of the implementation of the booking system.

31.22 Committee members asked if the booking system will limit which HWRS sites people can use and how it would deal with spontaneity when people's plans change at short notice (e.g. due to bad weather). The Waste Team Manager replied that residents could book any site, and the Team is looking at how other authorities have dealt with spontaneity and the booking of slots at short notice. The proposed system will allow people to book slots at short notice on the same day.

31.23 The Committee also asked if due diligence had been carried out on the booking system providers. The Waste Team Manager confirmed that checks had been carried out, and there were a small number of well established providers who were used by a number of councils.

Out of area use of HWRS

31.24 The Committee asked about the prevalence of out of area use of ESCC sites by residents from neighbouring counties. The Waste Team Manager responded that the Team knows that the sites near to the border of East Sussex are used by residents from neighbouring authorities, but does not have precise figures. It is suspected that the increase in use of sites such as Maresfield, where tonnages of waste have increased by 20%, are being driven in part by out of area use.

Motion

31.25 Councillor Hollidge moved a Motion that the original decision be allowed to take effect, and that the Committee takes no further action in regard to the call-in. Councillor Redstone seconded the Motion.

31.26 Councillor Redstone was invited to speak as seconder of the Motion. He outlined that he had spoken to the Parish Councils in the area he represents and they did not feel the need to respond to the consultation as they were happy with the proposal. He commented that the Parkopedia app might not help with queuing as queue lengths could change after people had left to travel to the HWRS. In terms of the call-in grounds, he did not consider there was a large digital divide and the Flexibus system had demonstrated that people will try to use an app if it will benefit them, even if they are not familiar with the technology. In his view, the point about the impact on the proposed unitary council was not relevant as the Lead Member's decision did not bind any future unitary authority to using a booking system and there was no evidence of a correlation between the introduction of a booking system and an increase in fly-tipping.

31.27 Councillor Hollidge was invited to comment before the Motion was put to a vote. He observed that the recommendation of the Governance Committee was that scrutiny of Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) should be within the Place Committee's remit. Therefore, there will be further opportunities to consider the impact on any unitary council. He concluded that the Council should proceed with the Lead Member's decision and that the Committee take no further action on the call-in.

31.28 The Chair put the Motion to a vote. The Motion was carried (5 in favour, 4 against and no abstentions).

31.29 The Committee RESOLVED to take no further action on the call-in in relation to the decision by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment regarding the Proposed Implementation of a booking system at Household Waste Recycling Sites (HWRS).

The meeting ended at 10.25 am.

Councillor Matthew Beaver (Chair)