

## Streetscene & Transportation Portfolio

### Background to the decision to recommend closure of the Hope HRC site

The Council is facing unprecedented reductions in the budget it receives from Welsh Government and the level of savings required cannot be achieved by improving the efficiency of the current service provision alone and unfortunately difficult decisions on the level of the services provided have been required. When making these difficult decisions it is important that the level of the existing service is understood when compared to the national position i.e. is the Flintshire County Councils provision at a higher standard than the national provision?

In respect of the HRC provision, the Council provides 7 facilities across the County, having just reduced the number by one following the closure of the site in Saltney (again because the facility there was too small to offer a full range of recycling services). The number of sites is high when compared to all other Councils and this is particularly relevant given the geographical size of the County when compared to others in Wales.

Local Authority	Number of sites	Local Authority	Number of sites
Blaenau Gwent	1	Merthyr Tydfil	2
Bridgend	4	Monmouthshire	4
Caerphilly	6	NPT	3
Cardiff	4	Newport	1
Carmarthenshire	5	Pembrokeshire	6
Ceredigion	4	Powys	6
Conwy	2	RCT	5
Denbighshire	5 *	Swansea	5
Flintshire	7	Torfaen	1
Gwynedd	7	VoG	2
Isle of Anglesey	2	Wrexham	3
*2 small sites with restricted opening times			

WG have produced advice on what it expects modern HRC sites to comprise of and a WLGA working paper on the national provision of HRC's concluded that Flintshire Council's HRC provision is the most expensive in Wales (in terms of overall cost and cost per household) yet despite this expenditure, the Council failed to achieve the expected overall recycling rate at all of the sites. It recommends that large high quality HRC sites should be provided at strategic locations and that a 5 mile (15 minute) drive is not unreasonable to gain access to the facilities.

It is clear therefore that the level of Council HRC provision exceeds that provided by other Councils in Wales and also that the facilities provided at some of the sites do not reach the required standard and that this is particularly the case at the Hope HRC site. A full review of the HRC provision across the County was therefore required with the saving identified by the closure of Hope HRC site alone estimated to be approximately £200k per annum.

In addition to reductions in revenue funding, the Council is facing year on year reductions in the level of Sustainable Waste Management Grant (SWMG) which it receives each year from WG to assist in delivering the challenging recycling targets.

## Consultation

The Council launched the open consultation period entitled 'The Big Budget Consultation' in August 2014. The background set the context and provided some indication of the scale of the financial challenge facing Flintshire County Council in the years ahead, but particularly in the 2015-16 financial year.

Individual portfolio Business Planning proposals, which were designed to reduce operating costs and deliver the necessary efficiencies, were developed over the 2014 autumn period and took into account the feedback from the residents through the 'Big Budget Challenge' and considered the level of service provided in each individual area of the Councils service provision.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) presented the portfolio's Business Planning proposals for the 2015/16 financial year in January 2015 to two All member workshops. At this point a decision on the future of individual HRC sites had not been taken and the Business Plans included a proposal to

*"Rationalise the HRC provision and outsource the management of the facilities to improve recycling rates"*

The full proposals, which included the above were then presented to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2015 and the indicative budget proposals were formally approved by full Council in February 2015.

Two all member workshops were then held on the 10th and 12th March 2015 to discuss the details within the proposals, with invitations extended to representatives from all Town and Community Councils. Both of the sessions were well attended and the Streetscene and Transportation Business Plans for 2015/16, which now included specific details regarding the closure of Hope HRC site, were discussed at length and the comments from the sessions noted.

A special Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 19th March considered the proposals and the feedback from the two workshops. The committee recommend acceptance of the overall proposals for the waste service and also asked Cabinet to consider an option for Hope to remain open as a 'Recycling Only' facility - which would operate at weekends only.

After due consideration by the Cabinet member, this proposal was rejected for the following reasons:

- The site is too small to accommodate the level of recycling containers required to deliver a larger scale recycling service and there is no funding available to extend the site
- The record of the site in terms of recycling is poor with no indication that the situation might improve if the site were to remain open
- The cost of providing the service, when compared to the amount of recycling material that would be brought to the site over the weekend, would not be sustainable or justifiable.
- The need to achieve the financial savings brought about by the budget settlement from WG

Cabinet considered the final proposals for all of the HRC sites in April 2015 and provided a period for further dialogue to take place before a final decision on the site could be taken on the future of the site.

## Rationale for the Hope HRC site closure

### 1. Unit cost of operations and low utilisation levels

Following the formal agreement by full Council to review the HRC provision, the operations and cost models for each site were considered and a resulting decision to put Hope HRC forward for closure was based on a number of factors:

- Recycling performance - The site is the poorest performer for recycling of all of our sites achieving only a 52% recycling level (which has now been confirmed as 50% in 2014/15 - WG target for HRC's is 80%)
- Footprint -The site has only a small footprint with insufficient space available to place additional recycling containers to help increase recycling and there is no funding available to extend the site.
- Site usage - The site has the lowest footfall of all the sites in Flintshire and the lowest number of residents within the catchment area of the site.
- Unit cost – The site has the highest unit cost (cost per tonne) of all HRC sites for managing the waste that is brought to the facility

The table below shows the recycling performance of all of our sites along with the annual footfall.

Site	Estimated Recycling levels	Annual Footfalls	Actual Recycling levels 2014 - 15	Updated footfall figures 2014 – 15 (actual full year)	Percentage of all HRC users at each site
Greenfield	68	65,676	70	131,034	24%
Mold	66	66,619	70	106,383	20%
Buckley	62	93,139	65	143,973	27%
Flint	56	43,336	57	79,275	15%
Connah's Quay	53	44,298	55	61,231	11%
Hope	52	14,781	50	24,219	4%

Hope HRC handles just 5% of the total waste arising from all HRC sites and given the low tonnages, the site has the highest handling costs/tonne of all of the sites in the County

Anticipated operational savings achieved by closing the site will be in the region of £200k

This is based on -

Direct operating costs (labour, maintenance costs, NNDR etc)	- £150k
Improvement in recycling rate at the alternate HRC (Assuming 80% recycling rate)	- £50K

## **2. Safety Issues and size of the site – Delays and poor user experience for visitors**

Given the size of the site and the lack of funding to extend (and the complications of extending onto a previous landfill sites) the site layout is restricted and the operations require the site to be regularly closed to allow skips to be emptied. Queues then form onto the public highway creating Health and Safety concerns and regular delays for users

## **3. Catchment area of potential users of the site**

The site has the lowest number of potential users within the defined catchment area, when compared to the other sites – this is supported by the relatively low user levels at the site.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Will Fly-tipping increase because of the decision to close Hope HRC?**

Anecdotal evidence from other areas in the Country where HRC sites have closed does not support this concern. Fly-tipping is a criminal offence and it is unlikely that a further short journey to a more suitable facility would lead to the majority of residents breaking the law. It is fair to argue that if visitors to the HRC are already acting as responsible citizens by bringing their recycling/waste to one HRC, then they could reasonably be expected/predicted to travel slightly further to dispose of their waste, without resorting to any illegal activity.

Staff from the Streetscene service will continue to monitor the area and deal with any fly-tipping occurrences that may occur – the standard for removing fly-tipping on Council land within 24 hours of notification will continue to be applied

### **Can the site operate a ‘Weekend only’ service with the site continuing to be operated by the Council**

Given the financial climate and the reasons detailed earlier in the report, this option is not affordable

### **Can the Local Community Council take over the operation of the site?**

Yes: the Council are in discussion with many Town and Community Councils regarding Asset transfers and HRC's could be included on the list of possible transfers. Community Council's would have to take on the environmental permit at the site and would be responsible for the cost of disposal for the residual (non recycled) material collected and not recycled - if the current arrangements were to be maintained.

Should the Community Councils wish to offer a ‘Recycling Only’ service from the site the Council could assist with servicing the site and with the sale of the recycled material to appropriate merchants.

### **Can the site be extended to form a more suitable facility in line with WG advice on HRC's**

There is no funding available for this work and there would be additional costs and permit difficulties in constructing a site on an old land fill site.

### **Where are the alternative sites and how far from Hope HRC are they?**

The two nearest sites to Hope HRC site are

Buckley – 5 miles

Mold – 6 miles

### **Will the proposals impact on the general waste collection rounds?**

No - The kerbside rounds will continue to collect only the recycling material presented in the containers supplied to residents. The rounds are based on the capacity of the bags provided and residents with large amounts of recycled cardboard etc. will continue to be required to take the material to the nearest HRC site. No additional capacity will be provided on the current rounds as a result of the proposals

### **Can additional 'Bring Sites' be provided in the local area?**

Yes – The Council would be interested and support the provision of additional sites and would welcome any suggested locations for consideration from members and the respective Community Councils.

### **Feedback following meeting with local Council Members – 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

The meeting attempted to reach a position where the site could remain operational into the future in a sustainable manner. It was agreed that given the current and on-going pressures on budgets, resulting from expected year on year reducing WG settlements, the matter would inevitably be revisited in the years ahead, unless a community based solution could be found.

Therefore a proposal to continue operating the site as a community asset with local volunteers or community groups taking on the daily site activities was explored.

Details would be need to be finalised however initial thoughts were as follows:

- Site to transfer to the group of interested Community Councils following the Councils Asset Transfer protocols
- Site to open as 'Recycling Only' facility on Saturday and Sunday only operated by the community

Note – Local members would prefer a residual waste disposal option to be provided at the site but this would not be possible given the ever increasing cost of landfill and national recycling targets imposed by Welsh Government

- County Council to provide support and guidance for permit applications etc.

- County Council to continue to service the site and provide access to the recycling markets used by the service and provide indicative value of the material likely to be received at the site.

If a notice of intent (expression of interest) was received from one or more of the local Community Councils to proceed on this basis, the Council would operate the above arrangements in the interim period of time to allow the asset transfer to take place and the new operating arrangements to be introduced

### **Timelines -**

Suggested time limit for receipt of notice of intent (Expression of interest) – 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015  
Target hand over date – subject to completion of Asset Transfer documentation – 1 January 2016

The new arrangement (Saturday / Sunday & 'Recycling Only') would commence under County Council control on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015 until the hand over takes place on 1 January 2016.

The site will close completely on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015 if notification is not received from the community councils.

All present at the meeting agreed that this was a sustainable route forward and agreed that the proposals should be presented to each Community Council for their consideration.