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# Household Recycling Centres – Flintshire County Council

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Gwilym Bury, Sabel Wiliam and Jeremy Evans under the direction of Huw Rees.

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# Summary report

## Summary

### What we reviewed and why

- 1 Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) provide the public with opportunities to recycle their waste and these sites have helped councils in Wales to improve recycling performance. HRCs can increase recycling with relatively low investment when compared to other options. Improvements to site infrastructure can increase the range of opportunities to recycle and reuse waste. In addition, 'people' factors, such as efficient welcoming staff at sites, and accessibility within sites help to increase the efficiency of waste segregation and the willingness of citizens to use the facilities.
- 2 In many local government service areas, the ability of service users to influence services so that they meet their needs relies on 'voice' rather than 'choice', either because there are no alternative providers, or where there are alternatives, barriers such as cost or accessibility mean service users have limited or no access to them. This means that the views of service users and their ability to ensure that their voices are heard is particularly important in designing and delivering services and interventions that meet people's needs.
- 3 The context of decreasing resources for local government bodies provides additional impetus to ensure that services and interventions take into account the views, experiences and aspirations of service users. Ensuring that the experiences, views and aspirations of service users are taken into account when determining how and which services to reduce, increase or change in some other way increases the likelihood that services will meet people's needs and therefore provide better value for money.
- 4 Flintshire County Council (the Council) provides recycling opportunities for residents through a local charity which collects re-usable furniture and electrical items from their doorstep free of charge, 23 local recycling banks, and the Council's weekly door to door collection of recycling items.
- 5 The Council also has five HRCs to allow residents to recycle waste from their home. In addition, residents can bring general household waste items to the HRCs. The Council's HRCs are the focus of our review and we developed a survey to ask citizens for their views on them.
- 6 This review considered:
  - the Council's HRC strategy and performance against the vision set out in the strategy; and
  - how service users feel about the HRCs and whether service users feel they are able to inform service design and delivery.
- 7 Our survey was available online during April and May 2019. It was promoted by the Wales Audit Office and through the Council's website. In addition, over five days we also visited all five of the Council's HRCs where we spoke to service users. In

total we received 887 responses - 488 at the HRCs and 399 online<sup>1</sup>. Only 23 of the responses were from people not living in Flintshire, these were from people living in Wrexham, Denbighshire and Cheshire.

## What we found

8 Our review sought to answer the question: **Do the needs, experiences and aspirations of service users inform the design and delivery of services to more closely meet their needs?**

9 Overall, we found that: **The Council following its clearly set out vision, continues to invest in Household Recycling Centres and has listened to service users to help it secure public satisfaction, but increasing public understanding of how to recycle more effectively has potential benefit.**

We reached this conclusion because:

- the Council continues to invest in its Household Recycling Centres and Council has a clear vision for its Centres; and
- most service users are happy with the Household Recycling Centres, but increasing public understanding of how to recycle more effectively has potential benefit.

## Proposals for improvement

### Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

The table below sets out the proposals for improvement that we have identified following this review.

Proposals for improvement	
P1	The Council should consider how to increase public understanding of recycling and how they can recycle more effectively at HRCs in order to reduce the amount of general non-recyclable waste.

<sup>1</sup> The results of the survey are summarised in Appendix 1.

# Detailed report

**The Council following its clearly set out vision, continues to invest in Household Recycling Centres and has listened to service users to help it secure public satisfaction, but increasing public understanding of how to recycle more effectively has potential benefit**

**The Council continues to invest in its Household Recycling Centres and has a clear vision for its Centres**

- 10 The Council has been developing its approach to maximising the recovery and recycling of waste over a number of years. It adopted a Municipal Waste Strategy in 2010, designed to help meet Welsh Government recycling targets, followed by a Household Waste Collection Policy (the Policy) in 2011. The Policy was revised and updated in 2013, 2015 and 2016 to incorporate new arrangements to improve recycling rates in line with revised Welsh Government targets.
- 11 Changes made to the Policy in 2016-17 included a reduction in the number of HRC sites from seven to five, with the remaining sites being upgraded and the building of a new site at Greenfield which opened in 2019.
- 12 The Council has continued to invest in its HRCs between 2017 and 2019. The Council provided capital funding of £0.6 million to complete HRC redevelopment works in 2017 to 2019, with an additional £1.7 million funding provided by the Welsh Government.
- 13 The Council's annual business plans set out clear priorities to provide a high quality, sustainable HRC service. The Council regularly monitors and reviews HRC performance which continues to improve. The overall total percentage waste in Flintshire reused, recycled or composted (including HRCs and other collection methods) increased from 55% in 2012-13 to 68% in 2017-18, the third highest percentage for a council in Wales.
- 14 There has been little change to the overall number of HRC staff, and terms and conditions have remained the same over the last two years. The Council has not changed staff terms and conditions to reduce costs and has no plans to do so.
- 15 Council officers and members we spoke to have a good understanding of the need to maximise recycling in order to reduce landfill, increase recycling, and discourage fly tipping. They are aware of the need for HRC staff to promote recycling and is identifying ways it can tackle inconsistencies in staff behaviours through greater training.

## Most service users are happy with the Household Recycling Centres, but increasing public understanding of how to recycle more effectively has potential benefit

- 16 Nearly two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents felt that the household collections by the Council do not meet all their recycling and residual waste needs and feel they have to use the HRCs to dispose of this additional material.
- 17 The Council Policy is that at all HRCs general non-recyclable 'bagged waste will be opened for inspection to remove recyclable items'. Large signs are prominently displayed at all sites advertising this. We observed people being verbally questioned by HRC staff about the contents of bagged waste but we saw few physical checks taking place. At the time of our survey this policy was only being occasionally followed, to do so would have potentially generated large queues of vehicles developing at site entrances. Some survey respondents told us that they did not wish to recycle and knew that their bagged waste is unlikely to be physically checked at HRCs. The single most popular item (98% of the people who responded to our survey) brought to HRCs in the last two years was general waste. Although it is not possible to say how much potentially recyclable material is being missed in the general waste, the number of skips we saw being filled with general waste bags over five days at each of the HRC sites would suggest it could be significant. The Council should consider how it can communicate more effectively with the public to increase the understanding of why recycling is important and how to recycle more when using the centres.
- 18 Although most of the survey comments we received were very positive about the HRC service, some respondents commented on the differences between summer and winter opening times; in the summer months opening times are 10am to 6pm, and in the winter opening times change to 9am to 5pm. Survey respondents who spoke to us said the different opening times are confusing and that summer times were less convenient for most people. We observed at all sites a significant number of vehicles queuing before the HRCs opened at 10am and that the period from 5pm till 6pm was the quietest part of the day at each site.
- 19 The Council proactively engages with service users and can demonstrate that it uses customer feedback to inform service delivery. For example, when reviewing its HRCs, the Council consulted HRC users on proposed changes and then changed their plans in response to people's suggestions which was subject to further consultation in relation to the new proposals for Flint and Connah's Quay.
- 20 The Council recognises the need to engage with residents and work with them to boost recycling rates. The Council engaged with local members and community councils regarding proposed HRC closures in 2017 and again in 2018 and explored the potential of community asset transfers and retaining some of the sites earmarked for closure. The Council also surveyed residents on waste service provision and aspirations for HRC provision and undertook a county-wide communication campaign in 2017 to inform residents of changes to collection rounds and to highlight the additional materials that would be collected for

recycling. In response to public and scrutiny concerns over proposed 2017 HRC closures, the Council explored options which would provide a compromise between WRAP's<sup>2</sup> recommendation of three HRCs and residents' preference for more localised provision. As a result, the Council decided to retain and upgrade Buckley HRC and to replace the existing Flint and Connah's Quay sites with a single modern HRC facility.

21 Despite this, over two thirds (68%) of our survey respondents could not remember the Council engaging with them or asking their opinion on HRC services. The Council should therefore consider how it can communicate more effectively the results of its engagement.

22 From our survey results we also found that:

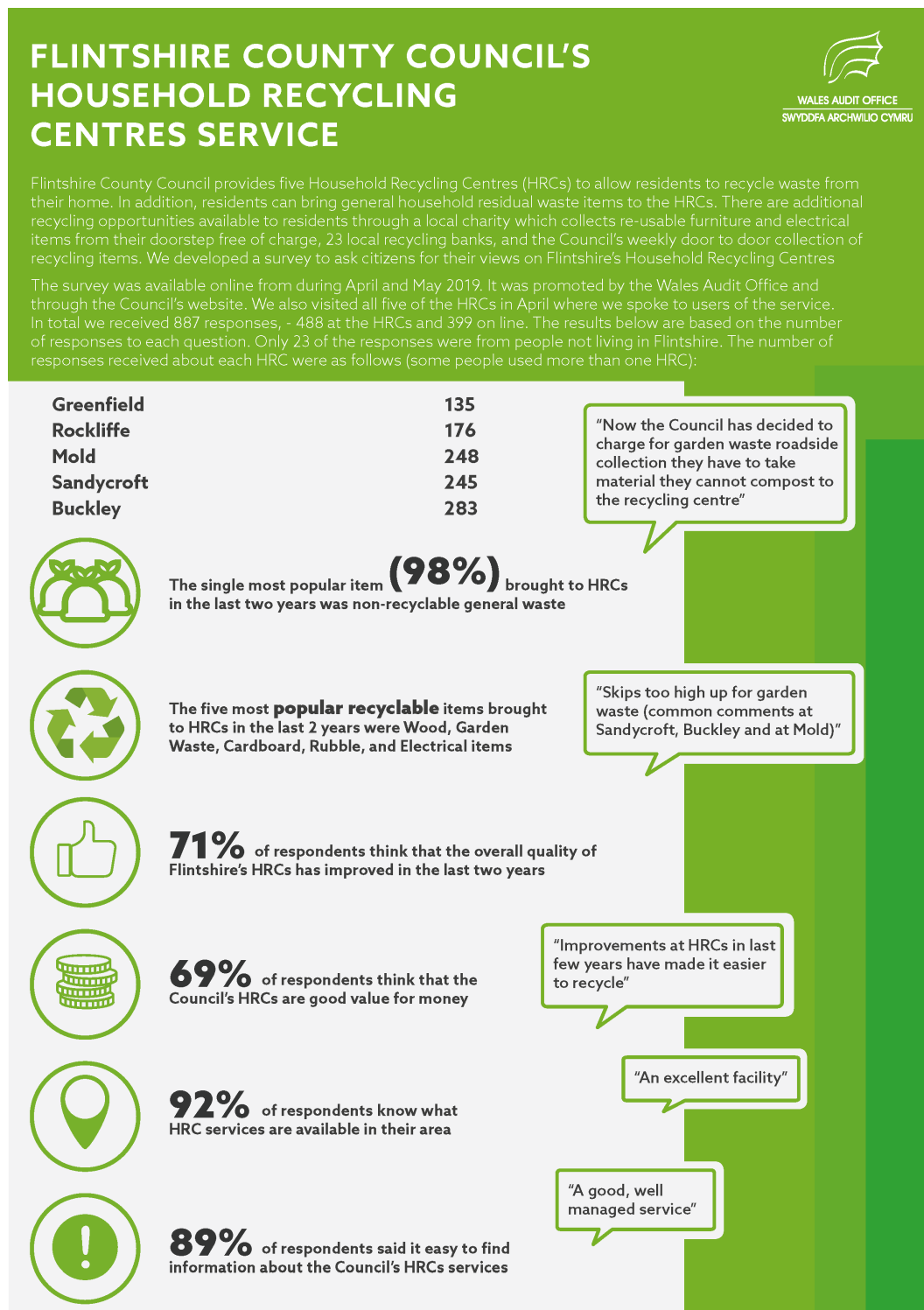
- Most respondents to our survey are happy with Flintshire's HRC services:
  - 71% think the quality of the service has improved in recent years;
  - 69% consider the service good value for money; and
  - 59% found staff are polite and helpful.
- Most people we spoke to in our survey were well informed about local HRCs:
  - 92% are aware what HRC services are available locally; and
  - 89% said it is easy for them to find the information they need about HRCs.
- People we spoke to in our survey told us the five most popular recyclable items brought to HRCs in the last two years were wood, garden waste, cardboard, rubble, and electrical items.

<sup>2</sup> The Waste and Resources Action Programme (which operates as WRAP) is a registered UK Charity providing advice and guidance across Wales



# Appendix 1

## Survey results infographic





**68%** of respondents said they had **not** been consulted effectively on recent changes to HRC services

The most common reasons for using the Council's HRC services are:



**76%**

convenient location



**63%**

Wide range of recycling skips available



**59%**

Staff are polite and helpful



**65%**

The collections by the Council from their home do not meet all their recycling and residual waste needs and feel they have to use the HRCs



**65%**

It's important that people should recycle as much as possible

"9 to 5 opening all year would be better with no change in the Summer opening times"

"The Buckle HRC site is badly planned for parking and poorly sign posted"

"Staff always help you to unload"

"A good, well managed service"

Only **23%** said that they would still use HRCs for disposing of rubble, plasterboard, roofing felt, or tyres if they had to pay a contribution to the Council



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