

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **11th March 2025**

Report Subject: **Review of Green Waste Bag Charges and Opening Days of the HWRCs**

Portfolio Holder: **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member Place & Environment**

Report Submitted by: **Service Manager Neighbourhood Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
14/01/25	12/02/25	03.03.25			11/03/25	09.04.25		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
To provide the Members of the Place Scrutiny Committee with a review of the Green Waste Bag charges and the opening days of the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs).
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 **Review of Green Waste Bag charges**
 - 2.1.1 Blaenau Gwent issues recycling bags and boxes to residents free of charge. As part of the Council's income generation strategy for 2024/25, a trial was introduced to charge residents an administration and delivery fee for new and replacement green waste recycling bags.
 - 2.1.2 To combat the rising costs of waste and recycling receptacles and to bring services in line with other Welsh local authorities who are charging residents for replacement bins and green waste collections, BG proposed options of this potential revenue generating practice. The option to charge residents for green waste recycling bags was taken forward for 2024/25 on a trial basis and residents were subsequently charged £2 per green waste bag for the 2024 green waste collection season.
 - 2.1.3 Analysis of customer service data for 2024 has shown the following from a total number of 632 customer service enquiries:

Complaint regarding green bag charges	7	Residents complained that they pay enough council tax and were not willing to pay for bags to recycle their green waste.
Bags blown away/missing following collection	46	Residents complained about crews not returning the green waste bags following collection and residents were not prepared to pay for replacement bags. In response

		CCTV on vehicles is checked before providing replacement bags free of charge.
Green waste placed out in blue/white bags and not collected	17	Residents complained that we would not collect green waste in blue or white bags because they were not willing to pay the £2 charge for the green waste bags.
Other	143	Majority of calls were to complain about repeated missed collections and requested a manager call back.
Reporting a missed collection	419	

2.2 **Review of HWRC Reduced Opening**

- 2.2.1 Blaenau Gwent operates two Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) at Roseheyworth (RH) in Abertillery and New Vale (NV) in Ebbw Vale respectively.
- 2.2.2 As part of the Council's cost saving strategy for 2024/25, Members resolved to trial further partial closures at NV and RH HWRCs. The agreed trial reduced opening from 6 to 5 days per week at both HWRCs, whilst retaining availability of at least one of the HWRCs 7 days per week.
- 2.2.3 Following a Consultation Period with the Joint Trade Unions, the trial partial closures were implemented on 24th June 2024 and are forecast to return a saving of approximately £25,500 (based on 9 months to March 2025) plus the associated savings in employer oncosts.
- 2.2.4 Currently, RH HWRC is closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays, whilst NV HWRC is closed Thursdays and Fridays.
- 2.2.5 Initially the trial closures were not well received by the public. Reports received from the HWRCs suggested several face-to-face complaints were made daily, taking a period of around 5 to 6 weeks to settle down.
- 2.2.6 In contrast, a small number of formally registered complaints and queries were received by the call centre comprising a single corporate complaint along with three general enquiries. A number of negative comments and observations were also noted on social media.

- 2.2.7 Putting the initial 6 weeks aside, then overall it would appear that the public has adjusted to the changes. This may have been alleviated by the continued availability of at least one HWRC 7 days per week.
- 2.2.8 The changes were implemented without any job losses to the permanent workforce, with impact on Agency assignments limited to a small reduction in the number of shifts worked.
- 2.2.9 Reducing the weekly opening hours has caused a conflation in daily traffic i.e. 7 days traffic is now being received over 5 days, which has contributed to sustained peak periods and longer queues especially during the busier summer months. Unfortunately, when these factors combine it causes labour resources to become stretched which may cause service levels / standards to dilute accordingly. This in turn, increases the likelihood of service complaints and places the Attendants at greater risk of verbal abuse from site users.
- 2.2.10 A comparative analysis of tonnage inputs at the HWRCs for Quarters 2 2023 and 2024 is shown below.

Site	Jul to Sep 2023	Jul to Sep 2024
New Vale HWRC	1,098.62	1,135.85
Roseheyworth HWRC	688.68	862.23

- 2.2.11 Tonnage input data since the trial was implemented, is limited and the dataset is perhaps too small to draw any conclusions in respect of the closures.
- 2.2.12 However, the figures as they stand reveal a marginal uplift in tonnage at NV HWRC 37.23 tonnes (3.4% uplift) with a higher increase at RH HWRC of 173.55 tonnes (25.2% uplift).
- 2.2.13 The tonnage uplift at RH HWRC can be partly explained by the implementation of the trade waste recycling scheme in October 2023 which has certainly introduced more tonnage to the site. Other factors such as RH HWRC not being as established as its sister site, but is gaining in popularity, are likely to account for the increased footfall, rather than impact of the closures per se.
- 2.2.14 It is also very likely that demand for the HWRC service is naturally increasing, due to a number of sizeable new build housing estates within the Borough over the last 5 years or so.
- 2.2.15 In addition, since the closures were implemented:
- There has been no increase in flytipping activity at or around the sites.
 - There has been no increase in demand for pest control services at the sites.
 - Intruder trespass at the HWRCs has not significantly increased on the additional days of site closure.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Review of Green Waste Bag charges**

Option 1 - Adopt the charge to residents for green waste recycling bags on a permanent basis. The £2 charge will be included on the fees and charges register and increase in line with Council policy each year. The charge will continue to support the administration and delivery of the green waste bags to residents (Preferred option).

Option 2 – Revert to supplying all recycling bags free of charge.

3.2 **HWRC Reduced Opening**

Option 1 - Give permanence to the decision implemented in June 2024 to trial the closure of the HWRCs for an additional day each during the week (Preferred option).

Option 2 - Reverse the decision implemented in June 2024 to trial the closure of the HWRCs for an additional day each during the week and return to 6 days per week operating at both HWRCs.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan** **Corporate Plan Priorities**

Waste and recycling services support the Council Priority to ‘Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable Connected communities’ in particular ‘*to increase rates of recycling to enable us to achieve national targets*’.

Statutory Responsibilities

Local Authorities in Wales have been set statutory recycling targets through the Wales Waste Measure 2010, and failure to meet the targets will result in a financial penalty from Welsh Government.

Gwent Well-being Plan

Waste and recycling services support the Well-being objective ‘where the natural environment is protected and enhanced’ by using our resources in a fair and sustainable way.

5. **Implications Against Each option**

5.1 **Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)**

Review of Green Waste Bag charges

5.1.1 Income generated in 2024 is outlined below:

	Total requests	Total number bags	Total income
Apr-24	149	342	£ 684.00
May-24	274	655	£ 1,310.00
Jun-24	209	511	£ 1,022.00
Jul-24	165	418	£ 836.00
Aug-24	143	335	£ 670.00
Sep-24	74	164	£ 328.00
Oct-24	27	67	£134.00
totals		2492	£ 4,984.00

5.1.2 **HWRC Reduced Opening**

Option 1 ensures the savings budgeted for 2024/25 are retained at approximately £34k per year plus the associated savings in employer's oncosts.

Option 2 reverts to 2023/24 operating hours and would negate the savings offered and would result in a £34k budget pressure.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

There is a risk that the Local Authority will continue to face financial penalties from the Welsh Government if it fails to achieve the statutory recycling targets.

5.3 **Legal**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no human resources implications associated with this report.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

There are no Health and Safety implications associated with this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Performance information has been included in the main body of the report.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Continued efficient and effective kerbside waste and recycling collections and continued public access to at least one HWRC across seven days.

6.3 **Involvement** (*consultation, engagement, participation*)

The proposals were introduced for a trial period which has allowed the service to analyse feedback from residents during this time.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term** (*forward planning*)

Charging for green waste sacks will support the financing of a discretionary service and ensures this service can continue to be delivered to residents.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

Effective waste management at a local and national level can help reduce our Ecological footprint, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change impact, therefore preventing problems from getting worse.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

Waste Services continue to work closely with the Welsh Government through Local Partnerships and Wrap to further develop and improve the service to achieve future targets.

6.7 **Integration**

n/a

6.8 **Decarbonisation and reducing Carbon Emissions**

n/a

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**

Attached at Appendix 1.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Customer service requests, complaints, fly tipping incidents at sites, pest control activities at sites and frequency of intruder trespass at sites will continue to be monitored regularly.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment