

Buckinghamshire County Council

Household Recycling Centres: Service Review

July 2018



This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for market research, ISO 20252:2012 and with the Ipsos MORI Terms and Conditions.



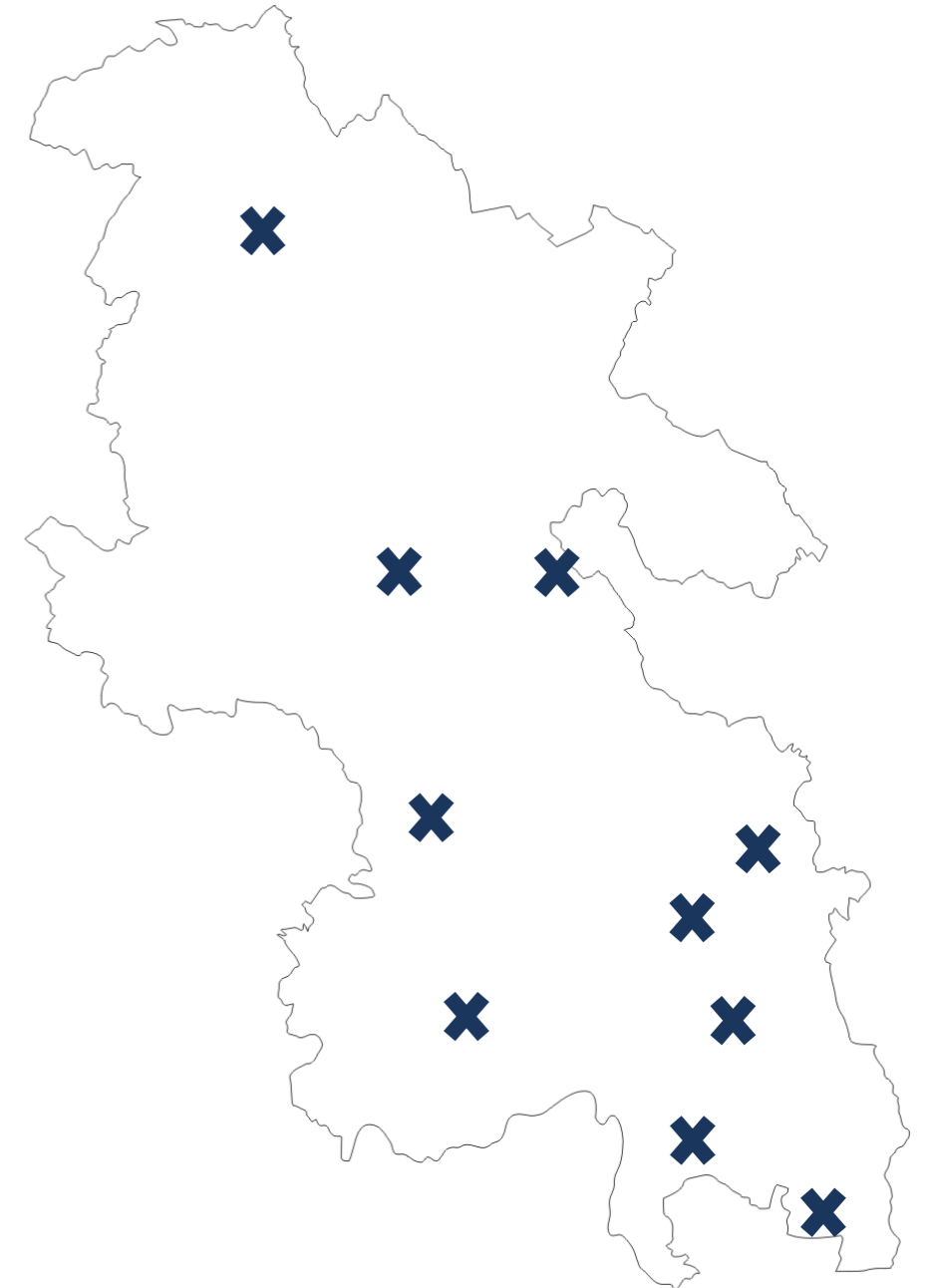
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Key findings

- Residents generally spoke **positively** about their experiences at Household Recycling Centres (HRCs), especially at modern, purpose built sites.
- There were concerns that **any** changes to HRCs would increase **fly tipping**.
- **Reducing opening days** was the **most popular** option among residents.
- Providing **context** to proposed options was key to them being accepted. This includes **who** will be affected by changes, and to **what** extent.
- Residents want to know **how** changes would be implemented and managed, and this was often the focus of their concerns.

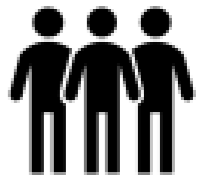
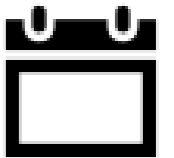
Objectives

- To support the Council in understanding the **views of residents** in respect of HRC service requirements.
- Understand the current **expectations** of the HRC services for residents and explore their **knowledge of what the services does** and does not offer.
- Explore **options and variations for service models**, including the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- Enable the council to inform a large scale **public consultation** on the HRC service review.



Methodology

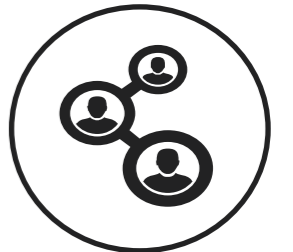
- **4 discussion groups** in High Wycombe and Aylesbury (16th – 17th July 2018), 90 minutes each.
- 3 groups with **HRC users** (residents who have used a HRC in the past 6 months) and 1 group with **low users** (residents who have not used a HRC in the past 6 months).
- All groups contained a combination of residents from **different districts**, with a **mix of demographics** including age, gender, ethnicity, disability and social grade.
- Participants were recruited through a mixture of **face to face recruitment** (recruiters working in local towns to approach people, in person, to take part) and **lists** (of participants who have pre-agreed to take part in research).



Using qualitative research

When considering these findings, it is important to bear in mind what a qualitative approach provides.

- It explores the **range of attitudes and opinions** of participants in detail.
- It provides an insight into the key **reasons underlying** participants' views.
- Findings are **descriptive** and **illustrative**, not statistically representative.
- Often individual participants hold somewhat **contradictory views** – 'cognitive dissonance'.
- Participants are provided with detailed information and thus become **more informed** than the general public.



Perceptions of BCC and its services



Perceptions of council services

- Residents held significant **misperceptions** of the services provided by Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC).
- **Waste and recycling services:** spontaneous mentions which were predominantly positive. For example, the frequency and reliability of bin collections.
- **Roads:** attracted the heaviest criticism, especially for the prevalence of potholes.
- **Educational services:** were highly valued by a number of residents, especially parents of young children.
- **Similar** to perceptions of other local authorities



Potholes. Need I say more? It's awful.



Rubbish collection is good. It's very consistent. The bins are collected the same time every week. Even when it snowed they came.

Emergency services

Road maintenance

Christmas decorations

Education

Libraries

Social care

Street cleaning

Parking

Household recycling centres: general views and principles



HRCs: general views

- Residents tended to use HRCs **irregularly**, usually as a result of specific events (clear out) or to dispose of certain types of waste (excess garden waste during summer, electric items which can not be put in household bins).
- Generally, residents spoke **positively** about their experience at HRCs. Low use residents tended to be least positive, often being put off by one-off negative experiences.
- The differences between sites was acknowledged. Criticism was mainly limited to older sites, where residents spoke of negative experiences with staff, queuing, and poor labelling



Staff (friendly, helpful, proactive)

Clear labelling (of waste bins and waste types)

No restrictions on number of visits

Site location and layout (easy access, nearby)



Unhelpful staff

Long queues (particularly at weekends)

Household recycling centres: trade offs

Longer opening hours vs more HRC sites

There was a strong **preference for longer opening hours**, as these would benefit residents working long/irregular hours and there were already a sufficient number of conveniently located sites. It would be difficult to find an appropriate location to build a new site. However, some felt current opening times were sufficient and had concerns that longer hours would increase **queuing**.

If there are already 10 sites across the county and we know where they are, we don't need more.

Travelling further vs ability to use sites more frequently

Residents were **averse to travelling further**, as they **valued their time**. Further travel was seen as **detrimental to the environmental good** they were trying to achieve from recycling, and would increase **fly tipping**. Travelling further was only preferable if wanting to use newer, more efficient sites.

We already travel enough. If it takes longer, it takes more time out of our lives.

Charging for some commodities vs free, if less convenient service

Charging was seen as **unfair**, as residents felt they were '**paying twice**' due to council tax. There was confusion about what would be charged for and how it could be enforced. They also felt charging for some commodities could be a '**slippery slope**' for further charging which, in turn, would increase **fly tipping**.

I'm not happy with being charged. It's just another cost. Life is expensive as it is.

Household recycling centres: Individual options



Reducing opening days: from 7 days a week to 5

- Residents were largely **positive** about this, viewing it as an option that '*made sense*' and wouldn't have any significant impacts on them.
- However, this support came with a number of caveats:
 - Sites must **remain open on the weekends** (when residents were most likely to use them). Some residents automatically associated '5 days' with Monday-Friday.
 - Closures should be **co-ordinated with other sites** so at least one site would always be open (this would prevent the exclusion of residents working over the weekends).
 - Opening days must be **clearly communicated** (otherwise residents may turn up to closed sites, leading to frustration and fly tipping).

Wording should clearly explain that '5 days' wouldn't just be weekdays, e.g. 'sites would remain open on weekends'. Alternatively, name the days likely to close.

If they don't close on weekends it doesn't feel like much of a change anyway.

Automatically, I read 7 to 5. It wasn't logical that they would close it at weekend. In my head the 5 is the working week.

With the sites in Aylesbury, they could alternate the days off so that one is open on the days the other is closed. That way there's always something open.

Extending re-use shops

- There was **mixed awareness** of re-use shops. Residents who had previously used them had positive experiences, especially in relation to the items for sale, such as bikes.
- Extending re-use shops was seen **positively** as it **encouraged recycling, reduced waste**, would be easy to implement and a 'no brainer'.
- There was **confusion on how the funds were used**. On the one hand, that money raised is given to charity (another benefit to extending them); on the other hand, predominantly low users thought the profit might be kept by the council or a private business.
- Caveats to extending re-use shops included:
 - Funds going to **charity**
 - Shops placed in prominent positions (to increase awareness) but in a location which wouldn't impact on **access**

They're fantastic. I've got a few things from them. One person's waste is another person's treasure.

To me that's common sense

I wouldn't like it if the money were going into somebody's back pocket.

Wording should clearly state how funds are used e.g. 'all money made by re-use shops goes to charity'. Loaded or ambiguous phrases, such as 'profit', should be avoided.

Limit access to residents only/recharge costs to neighbouring local authorities

- There was a desire for **fairness** (it felt unfair for non-residents to use BCC services), but this conflicted with a desire for **flexibility** (to use their preferred site and change this at their choosing).
- Residents were concerned about the **practicalities** of how you would identify non-residents.
- They were dubious that the money generated would outweigh the **costs of implementing** and maintaining such a system.

I just want it to be fair.

I don't see the point. If you have rubbish to recycle, just go to the nearest. It's still doing the same thing.

I think that implementing the plan might cost more than the saving if you become so zealous about enforcing it.

Wording should clearly explain how access would be limited e.g. 'car number plates would be scanned when entering the site'. Explaining the practicalities of recharging to other Local Authorities is complex so should be excluded.

Non-statutory waste charging

- Residents were **not aware** of the term 'non-statutory waste charging' and found it confusing.
- There was confusion as to whether charging was already in place and how it would change.
- Negativity towards charging stemmed from concerns over:
 - People finding ways of **avoiding charges** (leading to fly tipping, disposing of items in household bins or lying about the waste they took to sites)
 - How charging would be '**policed**'
- Residents who supported charging generally felt such charges wouldn't apply to them.

Wording should avoid 'non-statutory', instead clearly explain that specific types of waste (with examples) may be charged for. Additionally, it may be beneficial to state the approx. % of residents who would be affected by charges.

Use simple English. Non-statutory doesn't mean anything to anyone.

Isn't that the case already? What's changing?

All these words, like 'limiting' and 'charging' make the changes seem negative. If you say you're limiting what you can do or charging people to do it, they'll look for other ways.

It's hard to police. How do you quantify it?

Reducing the HRC network: closure of sites

- There were concerns that remaining sites would become **busier** (reducing the effectiveness of modern sites), users may have to **travel further** and the increasing population would create more future demand.
- Residents were more open to potential closures if **older sites** were closed and remaining sites would be made more efficient through suitable access and longer opening times.
- After seeing a map of the 10 current HRCs in Buckinghamshire, residents were more open to site closures.
- They were surprised by how few sites were in the north (meaning it would only be appropriate to close one of the southern sites) and wanted to know whether there were **alternative sites nearby** in bordering counties.

Wording should refer to site closures, rather than 'reducing the network'. If possible, name proposed sites as this would reassure unaffected residents (who would form the majority).

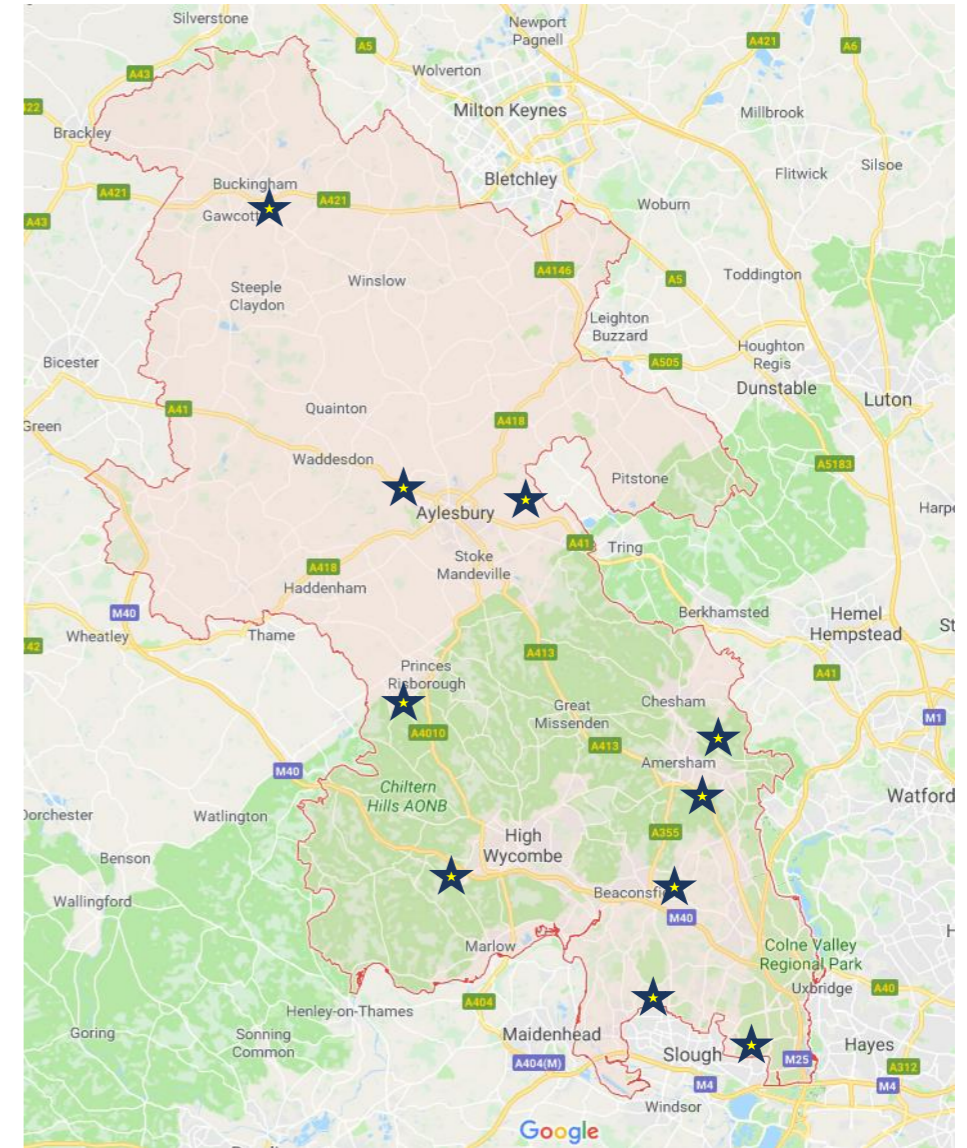
It would put more pressure on the ones that are currently working well.

I'm all for the ones that are smaller, harder to access and can't take same number of cars. As long as investment goes to the good ones.

They should look to corroborate with other councils, if they're one side of border.

Reducing the HRC network: closure of sites

- Residents were shown a larger version of the map on the right, outlining Buckinghamshire and its HRCs (marked by stars).
- While the effectiveness of the map was not a focus of conversation, residents found the map **useful** to understand site locations in the context of the whole county.
- On the whole, the map seemed clear, but could have been **larger**, with key town **names larger** and bolder.
- The Buckinghamshire county boundary and use of stars to mark HRC sites was **clear**.



Costs and concerns



Option preference and cost comparison

Residents were asked to select their most and least preferred option, before and after being shown options ranked by cost savings

Pre-cost: residents' preferences, ordered from most to least preferred

Reduce opening days

Extend re-use shops

Non-Statutory waste charging

Limit access to residents only/recharge costs to neighbouring local authorities

Reduce the HRC network

Post-cost: residents' preferences, ordered from most to least preferred

Reduce opening days

Non-Statutory waste charging

Extend re-use shops

Reduce the HRC network

Limit access to residents only/recharge costs to neighbouring local authorities

Option preference and cost comparison

- Presenting cost savings, even in an abstract sense, was helpful in crystallising the **context** for why changes to HRCs were needed and that 'business as usual' was no longer viable.
- Residents generally spoke of how the cost context **reaffirmed** their previous choice or convinced them to favour higher saving options.
- Some did not change their preferences in light of the cost saving context, saying that their preferences were based on what they would want personally, regardless of the impact on the council.

Residents understood the need for change, therefore a detailed explanation of the rationale for change is not needed.

'Saving' may hold connotations of excess money which is being 'saved' to be invested elsewhere. Therefore, alternative phrases could be used.

I don't want to, but when I saw that saved the most money, I would rather do that than shut a site. It's a compromise.

I've got a better grip of the situation. It's obvious now you see it that the shops are great but won't make much difference.

Mine stayed the same, but I think it was confirmed when I realised what I'd chosen also made the biggest savings.

Fly tipping

- Fly tipping was an emotive **concern** for residents. They spoke of the damage to the environment, eyesores in local areas and items such as sofas and fridges which were frequently seen.
- An increase in fly tipping was seen as a likely risk of **any** changes to current HRC service.
- Concerns were particularly prominent when discussing charging. Residents thought the funds generated through charging would be cancelled out by the cost to the council for dealing with fly tipping.

[Closing sites] will lead to an escalation in fly tipping. It's bad now. If you get rid of sites, it will absolutely soar.

It [charging] will encourage fly tipping

If you charge it will increase. Who pays the council? It's illogical. You will end-up not saving but spending more elsewhere.

Conclusions



Conclusions

- While **broader issues** contribute to residents' preferences (environmental impact), the potential **personal impact** on them is ultimately the key driver. Therefore, explanation of options must clearly explain **who** will be affected by changes, and to **what** extent.
- Residents were often confused about the **practicalities** of implementing service changes, leading to views that the options would inconvenience them while also not delivering the required savings for the council. Explanations of **how** changes will be implemented will be important to reassure residents.
- **Context** is essential. Residents became more amenable to certain options after knowing the potential cost savings. They were more open to site closures after seeing site locations in the context of the whole county.
- **Fly tipping** was a key concern for residents and will need to be addressed.
- **Wording** should reflect the language used by participants, containing sufficient detail to reassure residents about whether they will be affected and to what extent.

For more information



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