

WEST LOTHIAN: plan to cut hours for recycling centres

All five remain open but opening hours set to be almost halved

West Lothian's five recycling centres look set to have their opening hours and staff numbers cut in half – in a bid to maintain the service despite savage budget cuts.

The centres will be open for 144 hours a week – down from 280 – and nine of the 18 staff members will have to be redeployed. A booking system will also be set up for all vehicles attending the site.

The changes will mean two of the centres will only open for one day during the week.

The option was supported by Operational Services and backed by councillors on the Environment and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP) will help save £336,000 towards the £39m of cuts the council has been forced to make in this year's budget. The panel agreed the plan progress to the Executive, who have the final say on whether it will be approved.

It will see the busiest sites at Oakbank in Livingston, Whitburn, and Blackburn open three days through the week, while the quieter sites at Broxburn and Linlithgow will open one day through the week. All sites will be open on Saturdays and Sundays.

Revised opening hours will see the sites open longer on the days they are operating to make it easier to process material.

The new opening hours will be 10am to 6pm for Oakbank and Whitburn on Monday, Wednesday and Friday; 10am to 6pm on Tuesday and Thursday at Blackburn.

For Linlithgow it will be 10am to 6pm on Tuesday, 10am to 2pm Saturday and 2pm to 6pm Sunday.

For Broxburn 10am to 6pm Thursday, 2pm to 6pm on Saturday and 10am to 2pm Sunday.

Jim Jack, the head of Operational Services told the meeting: "Part of the savings comes from the introduction of a booking system. We believe that it would provide more certainty for users, reduce queuing and improve the management of the sites."

Officers calculated that £70,000 could be saved through the introduction of a booking system similar to the one which currently operates for vans and trailers in West Lothian, and is common in neighbouring local authorities.

In a report to the PDSP staff cuts were detailed: "From a staffing perspective, this option retains eight of the eighteen full-time members of staff, and staff would be retained on their existing shift pattern. This option is the most viable in terms of organisational change as it retains skills and knowledge within the workforce, keeps generally consistent hours across the sites leading to easier communication, and means managing waste is easier in the sites due to the longer working day."

Cllr Diane Calder, SNP, told the meeting she could not accept the reduction in hours planned for the Broxburn site.

"Option 2 doesn't look favourable at all for Broxburn. One day a week and the weekend cut hours. Why has Broxburn been considered over Blackburn when it covers not only Broxburn , Uphall and Dechmont it also covers Winchburgh.

She added: "What happens to the staff, are they redeployed?".

Mr Jack said the service would employ its organisational change policy and make "every effort to redeploy staff where we could"

He added: "We do have a good track record on delivering on that. That said it becomes more difficult each year."

The report outlined that redeployment proposals would be discussed with unions. The proposed new hours will come into operation in August.

Mr Jack told the meeting: "What we are being asked as officers to do is reduce the budget by approximately half so we have to look at how we model the opening hours. The reason sites are put forward for different opening hours is based on customer behaviour, the tonnages and visits.

"I appreciate it's a difficult decision to make but we cannot make these changes without doing that , and we are trying to preserve the busier hours at the weekend."

Cllr Kirsteen Sullivan said: "Does the fact that other authorities have a booking system encourage people from those areas to use West Lothian sites?"

"We have anecdotal evidence of that", said Mr Jack.

Cllr Calder said: "Could I please have it noted that I have great concerns about the disproportionate cut to the services in Broxburn."

Chairing the meeting, Cllr Tom Conn said this was not the first time the council has had to make cuts to the service and suggested Cllr Calder make representations to the Scottish Government over funding.

The panel agreed the plan progress to the Executive for approval.

by Stuart Somerville Local Democracy Reporter

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Broxburn's recycling centre on Greendykes Road will see its opening times cut to just one day through the week, on a Thursday, and reduced hours at weekends.