

Cuts to recycling hours in West Lothian brings complaints

Cuts to opening hours at West Lothian's recycling centres – and the need to book to go – have led to a surge in complaints about council services in the last year.

The introduction of the booking system added to the upsurge which saw customer complaints rise from 1,950 in Operational Services in 2022/23 to 2,262 in 2023/24.

The department had the highest number of complaints across the council last year. The total number of complaints about Operational Services has climbed steadily from 1,290 in 2019/20 – four years which saw the Covid pandemic and lockdown, as well as waste collection changes and recycling through budget cutbacks.

An officer said complaints always rose when change was forced on customers.

Joe Murray, a project manager with the council, told a meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel: "The revised opening times for Community Recycling Centres (CRC) in conjunction with implementing a new booking system to access the CRC sites has led to an increase in the number of complaints received."

Pauline Orr, SNP councillor for Linlithgow asked: "Whilst I

recognise that the changes made to the recycling centres and the bin collections are a contributory factor, what steps, if any, are being taken to improve services and what the timescale is for these?"

Mr Murray said: "What we are actually seeing is when there is a change in service there is a ramp up in complaints."

He added: "If we look at the number of complaints around the CRC sites, that has dropped off in quarter one, [April to June 2024]. When there's a change within the service which is looking for behavioural change by our customers there is a ramp up in complaints. A few changes Operational Services have carried out have had an impact on customers which did ramp up the complaints.

"As that gets installed across the localities those complaints tend to drop off, which we are seeing in the CRC sites."

Mr Murray said the service was now starting to see a rise in complaints around the introduction of charges for brown bins which came in at the start of June.

The council cut opening hours last September across the five CRC sites. Across the five sites the opening hours have been cut from 280 hours to 144 hours to save £336,000.

From October people have had to book- online or by phone- time slots to visit CRCs with vehicle registrations being checked by staff at the gates to centres.

The sites most affected by the cutbacks were Linlithgow and Broxburn which saw opening reduced to one weekday and only morning or afternoon opening on the weekends.

A report on the council's complaints procedure said: "The percentage of complaints that were upheld and partly upheld across the council in 2023/24 was 39.0% which represents a

decrease of 2% from the 2022/23 figure, which was 41.0%. The council's performance in relation to this measure substantially outperformed the Scottish national average 2022/23 which was 53.5%."

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter