

Council inspectors 'wading through used sanitary products' claim

Council inspectors have been accused of 'wading through women's used sanitary products' to see if families in East Lothian qualify for a bigger waste bin.

Residents say they have faced 'degrading' and 'humiliating' situations as they struggled with hygiene waste after the local authority moved its fortnightly household bin collections to three weekly.

A petition signed by more than 2,700 people called for the reinstatement of the two weekly service and claimed it discriminated against the most vulnerable in society, large families and the disabled.

A meeting of the council's petitions committee heard claims of council waste inspectors resorting to humiliating trawls through residents' refuge.

Kate King, who started the petition, told the meeting that a yellow bag service provided for absorbent hygiene products (AHP) left some people feeling embarrassed and humiliated as it alerted neighbours to the presence of an incontinent family member or need for extra collections.

And she said some people who had contacted her had talked about council workers going through their bins when they

requested a larger one to cope with additional waste when they did not want to use the yellow bags or know about them.

She said: "The yellow bag service is not promoted on the website or in the collection calendar. Many people do not want it because they do not want everyone to know there is an infirm person at home.

"And we need to stop council waste workers wading through women's used sanitary products to see if they qualify for a bigger bin."

The AHP service is not publicised by the council but does provide those who sign up with yellow bags which are collected kerbside every two weeks and can be used for nappies, sanitary products and incontinence pads.

The committee was told it was not promoted because of concern it would be misused.

Ms King added that in some cases neighbour, particularly in flats, had fallen out over people using their bins as their own filled up with some resorting to putting padlocks on their waste bins.

She urged the committee to return to fortnightly collections however Tom Reid, the council's head of infrastructure, said it would mean bringing in extra staff and vehicles with an estimated cost of £400,000 as well as losing the £500,000 saving the council is making with the reduced service.

Mr Reid told the committee the change was made to encourage more recycling by residents and meet national and local standards.

He said: "If you recycle as much as you can then the standard household waste bin is enough. The green bin should be the last resort for waste."

Mr Reid added that the AHP service was not a statutory

requirement for the council and recycling advisers visited homes requesting larger bins to “assist” them.

He said: “The household green bins should be the last resort for waste material. We do checks to make sure people are getting it correct.”

Councillor Lee-Anne Menzies told the committee she had pushed for the three weekly bin service, even advocating for a monthly collection but was told by Mr Reid it was ‘ridiculous.

She said: “I think the council is doing the right thing for the right reason. Our household is busy at the moment, and we don’t struggle. I recycle and we have two green recycling boxes, three blue recycling boxes and two white recycling bags.”

However, Councillor Jeremy Findlay told the meeting he had experienced the issues first hand after a visit by young family members who used nappies saying the green bin had smelled terrible.

The committee rejected the petition with councillors John McMillan, Norman Hampshire and Menzies voting against it with Councillor Findlay supporting it.

It also asked officers to look at ensuring carer groups were aware of the AHP service so they could identify people who may need it.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter