West Lothian Council reject bulky waste collection review

A bid to have West Lothian's bulky waste services reviewed has failed, despite growing concerns that the cost is stopping people using the service.

Livingston SNP councillor Maria MacAulay had argued that all residents should have access to bulky waste removal amid growing reports of waste piling up in gardens and communal bin areas across the county.

The councillor claimed growing numbers could not afford the bulky uplift service despite the fact charges were frozen in this year's budget and remain below the national average.

The fact you need a vehicle to access the recycling centres is also excluding growing numbers of people from using the service, she said.

But at a meeting of West Lothian Council, her motion calling for a review of the service was defeated by the Provost Cathy Muldoon's casting vote.

A Labour amendment calling on the Scottish Government to fully fund bulky waste services, which at the moment run at a loss, was instead backed by councillors.

Councillor MacAulay told the meeting: "Residents across West Lothian are increasingly concerned about bulky waste piling up in gardens and communal areas due to limited and costly disposal options. This leads to environmental risks, attracts

vermin, and negatively affects communities.

"This motion is simply asking for a review of the services. It's not complicated."

Fellow SNP councillors recounted experiences of rubbish being accumulated in gardens because households couldn't afford the £38 for five items uplift or could not access the recycling centres because they had no access to transport.

Councillor Andrew Miller representing Livingston North ward told the meeting: "There's a very visible problem in our communities. Lots of people have barriers to disposal, transport and finance. There is an equality that we should at least look at."

Tom Conn, Labour's Executive councillor for the Environment who raised the Labour amendment point out that it will cost the council £240,000 to operate a bulky uplift service. By comparison, income from bulky uplifts is approximately £135,000 a year.

 He added: "A charge of £38.59 therefore represents a significant subsidy applied to all service users, which covers around only 56% of the cost of providing the service."

Labour had planned to increase bulky uplifts to £50 but froze the cost at last year's figure to secure Conservative support for this year's budget. At £38 the cost for bulky uplift is below the national average of £41.

The Labour motion added: "There are other options available to households when disposing of large bulky items. Local charities such as Home Aid may be able to collect some items for free. If items are still usable, households may wish to consider re-use and offer them to a friend or neighbour or advertise them for sale online."

Lib Dem Sally Pattle backed the review as "a proactive

proposal," adding the council should work with communities.

In a vote the chamber divided, with 16 votes each for the motion and amendment and Provost Cathy Muldoon's casting vote went to the amendment.

After the meeting Councillor MacAulay told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "The SNP's initiative was driven by increasing reports of bulky waste piling up in gardens and communal areas, leading to environmental hazards, attracting vermin, and adversely affecting local communities.

"The motion sought a comprehensive review of current bulky waste services, aiming to identify barriers to disposal and explore solutions such as subsidised or free uplifts for financially struggling households, community collection days, and enhanced public awareness campaigns.

"Our communities are facing real challenges with waste management, leading to environmental and health concerns. Our proposal aimed to find practical, immediate solutions to support our residents. It's disheartening that Labour councillors chose to pass the responsibility to the Scottish Government rather than address the issue directly at the local level."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter