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Dear Minister

Concerns Regarding the Resilience of the WEEE System

I am writing to express Norfolk County Council's serious concerns regarding the resilience of the WEEE system, particularly in relation to cooling appliances, small domestic appliances and batteries, and the significant service disruption experienced in Norfolk. These challenges have had a considerable impact on residents and placed additional burdens on local authority services. Norfolk has experienced significant disruption to WEEE services for several months.

National capacity constraints for cooling appliances had already resulted in residents being unable to dispose of fridges and freezers at Household Waste Recycling Centres since March.

This situation was then compounded by a catastrophic fire at a local Approved Authorised Treatment Facility (AATF), which further reduced available capacity and extended disruption to other material streams, including small domestic appliances from April.

The combined impact has caused considerable frustration for residents and created significant operational pressures for the Council.

We are also increasingly concerned about the implications for battery disposal. Norfolk, like many authorities, continues to experience fires associated with lithium-ion batteries entering the waste stream incorrectly. Reduced disposal options have heightened these risks, and we have seen an increase in incidents with multiple battery-related fires during this period of service disruption. Each incident posing risks to staff, infrastructure and service continuity for the Council and our contractors

Throughout this period, Norfolk County Council has engaged constructively and in good faith with the Producer Balancing System (PBS) and wider WEEE arrangements to restore services as quickly as possible. While we recognise the complexity of the challenges involved, we have been extremely disappointed by the pace at which solutions have emerged. The disruption has persisted for many months, leaving residents without access to services they reasonably expect.

We have made good progress in recent days and anticipate services resuming shortly. However, we have been advised that national treatment capacity constraints for cooling appliances remain a significant issue and that further service interruptions may occur as capacity fluctuates.

This is deeply concerning. It is simply not realistic to expect Norfolk residents to rely on a service that is repeatedly switched on and off in response to treatment capacity elsewhere in the system. Local authorities cannot effectively communicate such uncertainty, nor should frontline staff be expected to manage the inevitable frustration that results.

The impacts extend beyond our recycling centres. The inability to dispose of cooling appliances through normal channels affects bulky waste collections and the clearance of fly-tipped waste, increasing operational pressures and costs for councils. These consequences ultimately fall on local taxpayers despite the underlying issues sitting elsewhere within the WEEE system.

While the fire was an exceptional event, Norfolk's experience raises wider questions about the resilience of the national arrangements. A single incident has resulted in months of disruption, and we are now being advised that ongoing national capacity constraints may continue to affect service delivery.

This should – and needs to be a matter of concern for Government.

We would therefore welcome greater clarity on:

- The extent of current national treatment capacity constraints for cooling appliances.
- What action is being taken to increase resilience within the cooling appliance treatment network.
- How Government intends to ensure that local authorities and residents are not left carrying the consequences of capacity shortages outside their control.
- Whether current producer responsibility arrangements provide sufficient safeguards to maintain continuity of service in circumstances such as those experienced in Norfolk.

We acknowledge the engagement from DEFRA and the Environment Agency during this period and recognise the efforts being made across the sector to identify solutions. However, Norfolk residents have now experienced months of disruption to a key public service and continue to face uncertainty regarding future provision. We believe this experience highlights the need for a more robust and resilient national approach to cooling appliance treatment capacity.

I would welcome your consideration of these issues and any assurance you can provide regarding the steps being taken to prevent local authorities and residents from bearing an undue share of the burden when failures occur elsewhere in the system.

Yours sincerely,

P Gould

Cllr Pat Gould

Portfolio Holder for Countryside, Coast and Culture

Norfolk County Council

Report from Councillor Patrick Gould

July 26

1-WEEE (Waste Electrical Electronic Equipment)

From Monday the 13th of July recycling of all electrical products will resume. This has been an extended period of difficulty since the previous contractor's depot burnt down in Thetford. I have been working with Kate Murrell from NCC to get the recycling of electricals back up and running. If you are questioned on this, you can tell the public that everything is back to normal. It must be remembered that fridges and freezers in the long term could cause problems as they may exceed the country's ability to deal with them all. A letter has been sent to central government to ask what they intend doing about this.

We also need to educate the public on the disposal of batteries as this is the main cause of fires at waste/recycling centres. Vapes are another problem.

2-Hillcrest School

I have been to the school with Jason Moore from highways and the confusion over signage will be rectified. This was because half the sign had faded away unfortunately. I have also asked to see if we can get a lollipop person to be available during the drop off and collection times. This should have a major effect on slowing the traffic down. This surprisingly is done by the Fire Service, and I have asked the Chief Fire Officer to start the process. I have asked the head teacher to prepare a report for them on the current situation.

3-A1122 intersection

Again, with Jason Moore and his colleagues from highways and Sue Prigg the councillor from Denver we discussed this road and the crossing from Downham to Denver. There is to be a new path from Broad Oaks along London Road in front of Wingfield's up to the existing traffic lights. This will stop people crossing at the end of London Road which is not particularly safe. However, my request to have a lower speed limit on the A1122 past the Downham turnoff will be arduous. After the initial consultations it would take a further 18 months before it could be implemented. This is very frustrating.