

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	18 June 2019
Subject:	Single-Use Plastics Update
Report of:	Head of Finance and Asset Management
Corporate Lead:	Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment
Number of Appendices:	None

Executive Summary:

In July 2018, the Council passed a motion recognising the staggering environmental impact caused by the use of single use plastics. As a result, recommendations were approved aimed at the elimination of single use plastics from Council buildings and its supply chains.

The Council has identified a number of products that are classed as single use plastic and has either already removed them from its operation or is in the course of doing so. It also has plans to review its procurement strategy later this year to ensure it effectively deals with single use plastics in its supply chain.

The report also provides some headline information about the Government's new waste strategy and the work of the Joint Waste Partnership.

Recommendation:

- 1. To ENDORSE those actions taken and proposed in order to eliminate single-use plastics from the Council's operations**
- 2. To CONSIDER the extracts from the Government Waste Strategy in relation to single use plastics.**

Reasons for Recommendation:

To reassure Members that steps are being taken to reduce and eliminate the use of single-use plastics from the Council's activities and to inform members of the initiatives and strategies being put forward locally and nationally.

Resource Implications:

None

Legal Implications:

None

Risk Management Implications:

None

Performance Management Follow-up:

The use of single-use plastics in our operations will be monitored through our procurement and facilities management activities.

Environmental Implications:

The Council is taking a pro-active approach to supporting the international agenda of reducing and eliminating the use of single-use plastics in order to protect the natural environment.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

1.1 It is estimated that 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic have been produced globally since the 1950s. Without urgent action to cut demand, this is likely to be 34 billion tonnes by 2050, the majority of which will end up in landfill or polluting the world's continents and oceans.

1.2 Given this background, the Council considered the following motion in July 2018:

This Council notes with concern that:

- 300 million tonnes of new plastic is made each year, half of which is for single use plastics such as packaging and convenience food.
- in many cases, such as plastic straws, take away food containers and coffee cups, there are practical alternatives available that are either reusable or sustainable.
- in 2016, the 'Ellen MacArthur Foundation' estimated that by weight there could be more plastic in our oceans than fish, as soon as 2050 as plastics are durable and strong they will stay in our environment for up to an estimated six hundred years. (Columbia University).
- marine plastic leads to coastal/offshore dead zones, entanglement, death through ingestion, toxic transfer and, once degraded into micro plastics, contamination of the food chain including our own.

This Council welcomes:

- the significant increase in recycling achieved in the Borough during the last decade through improvements to doorstep recycling.
- the success of the plastic bag levy introduced through the coalition government which has led to an 85% reduction in disposable plastic bag usage.
- the Conservative government's recently announced '25-year green plan' which pledges to stop all avoidable plastic waste by 2042.
- the impact that the BBC documentary 'Blue Planet' has had on public awareness and concern for this crisis. "

1.3 As a result, the Council approved:

1. That all single use plastics within buildings and facilities managed by the Council be eliminated by 2020 and efforts be made to encourage the elimination of single use plastics within the Council's supply chain by 2025.
2. That the work of the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Partnership in promoting the reduction of single use plastics across the County be supported and any opportunities to lobby central government be taken through the Partnership.

1.4 This report gives an update on the progress made of achieving this aim.

2.0 SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

2.1 There is no accepted definition of single-use plastics (SUP's), but common considerations include something that is made wholly or partly of plastic, and that is not intended to be reused or refilled for the same purpose as it was made for. Examples of single-use plastics include cotton buds, stirrers, straws and sanitary towels. They can be used for as little as a few seconds but when disposed can remain in the environment for hundreds of years. They are not currently recyclable in mainstream schemes.

2.2 The Chartered Institute of Waste Management (2018) estimates very short use and small plastic items (too small to mechanically separate) comprise between 100,000 and 400,000 tonnes per annum, up to 11% of total plastic waste generated. The paper notes that very short use plastics (less than one day) tend to have the greatest negative impacts at the production and end-of-life stages of the lifecycle.

2.3 The most commonly accepted examples of SUP's are:

- Plastic bags
- Plastic water bottles
- Disposable drinking cups and lids
- Straws
- Drink stirrers
- Other plastic cutlery
- Balloon stems
- Cotton buds
- Sanitary applications
- Food containers

2.4 It should be noted that not all plastic and single use plastic items are intrinsically bad. Many environmental groups actually support the use of plastic if, for example, it supports the fight against food waste, reduces the amount of damaged goods or is required to support public health.

3.0 PROGRESS TOWARDS ELIMINATING SINGLE USE PLASTICS

3.1 The resolution of Council requires the elimination of Single Use Plastics (SUPs) within buildings and facilities managed by the Council by 2020. It should be noted, however, that this cannot be applied to tenanted buildings and areas where the tenant is free within the current lease to conduct their business as they require. The Council has no power to intervene on this issue and the tenant must benefit from 'quiet enjoyment' of the lease.

- 3.2** A number of tenants already either have a policy on the reduction and eradication of SUP's or are working towards this, examples include Gloucestershire County Council and Places for People. The Council will actively encourage our other tenants to follow this lead.
- 3.3** Therefore, with the focus on the Council's own operations, we will, as a minimum, replace single-use plastics with viable alternatives, such as compostable materials, unless there are compelling circumstances that prevent us from doing so. In the long-term, we will aim to reduce and remove avoidable disposable products altogether and instead encourage more sustainable practices.
- 3.4** Since considering the motion, the Council has reviewed the use of SUP's within its operations and taken steps to remove, where possible, their use. The following table gives an overview of SUPs identified and action taken:

Plastic water bottles	Currently sold in vending machines. The vending machines will be removed from the offices in Spring 2019. As an alternative to bottled water, all areas of the building benefit from water supply machines.
Disposable drinking cups and lids	All cups have been replaced with cardboard alternatives.
Straws	Not used on site.
Drink stirrers	Remaining plastic stirrers being phased out and replaced with wooden stirrers.
Other plastic cutlery	The Council does not directly supply these, but contractors used to supply meeting refreshments sometimes supply them. Procuring officers to work with contractors to provide alternatives.
Milk cartons	Currently reviewing alternative provision.
Balloon stems	Not applicable.
Cotton buds	Not applicable.
Sanitary applications	No longer provided.
Food containers	Not applicable.

- 3.5** We will continue to assess whether there are other single-use plastics, beyond the list outlined in Paragraph 3.4, that are avoidable and / or have viable and sustainable market alternatives. Where we identify other single-use plastics that do not currently have a suitable alternative available, we will seek to reduce the quantity of plastic used instead.
- 3.6** The ban on single-use plastic does not include plastic brought in by staff; however, we will encourage staff to reduce the amount of plastic brought in by raising awareness and encouraging behavioural change. We will also continue to provide recycling facilities for staff to dispose of recyclable products.

- 3.7** In addition to this we will work with our event organisers to eliminate single-use plastics across all borough events held on Council land and will continue to support our communities and litter-pick initiatives to ensure our parks and open spaces are free from plastic litter.
- 3.8** With regards to the Council's supply chain, the procurement strategy and associated procedures will be reviewed and amended within the current financial year to ensure they require our suppliers to reduce and work towards zero avoidable SUP use (wherever possible).

4.0 OUR WASTE, OUR RESOURCES – A STRATEGY FOR ENGLAND

- 4.1** The Council will need to be mindful and supportive of the initiatives being undertaken by central government to tackle SUP's. In December 2018, the Government released its new strategy for tackling waste and environmental issues – Our Waste, Our Resources – A Strategy for England. The strategy focuses on known problems with effective solutions that, among other benefits, will reduce reliance on single-use plastics, cut confusion over household recycling, tackle the problems of packaging and end the economic, environmental and moral scandal that is food waste. The following paragraphs outline the main elements of the strategy focused on the issue of SUP's and the Governments intended response.

4.2 Banning the most problematic plastic products where there is a clear case for it and alternatives exist

In general, we prefer to help people and companies make the right choice, rather than banning items outright. There may, however, be times when a ban is appropriate as part of a wider strategic approach. We have already banned the sale of plastic microbeads, consulted on banning plastic drinking straws, stirrers and cotton buds, and are assessing the impact of banning other single use plastic items. We will continue to review the latest evidence on problematic products and/ or materials to take a systematic approach to reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastic products including problematic packaging materials, in line with our commitment to match and where economically practicable exceed the ambition of the EU in this regard.

4.3 Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for single use drinks containers, subject to consultation

UK consumers go through an estimated 14 billion plastic drinks bottles, 9 billion drinks cans and 5 billion glass bottles a year. The reported recycling rates are significantly lower than many other major developed economies at around 70%, leaving around 4 billion plastic bottles, 2.7 billion cans and 1.5 billion glass bottles not recycled every year.

This tells us that valuable recyclable material is being lost to landfill or incineration - or, worse, ends up in the open environment where it can have a serious impact on ecosystems and local people. Indeed, single-use drinks containers, or parts of them, regularly feature among the top ten items found on UK beaches. It is therefore important that we encourage changes in behaviour to stop littering at source and capture more recyclable resources.

A 2018 report into drinks container recycling and litter reduction, commissioned by Defra from the Voluntary and Economic Incentives Working Group, found that plastic drinks bottle collection/ recycling in some European countries with a DRS and some form of kerbside/household recycling collections can be as high as 95-98%. It also found that some rates of collection/recycling of aluminium, steel and glass drinks containers in countries with a DRS can be between 87 and 97%.

We will introduce a DRS in England for single-use drinks containers, subject to consultation. The consultation will look at how the scheme might sit alongside other measures to boost recycling and how it would operate – including administration and governance arrangements, and the setting of deposit levels. Along with our proposed reforms to packaging waste producer responsibility regulations, our proposals will ensure that more recycled materials are used, and packaging is reprocessed and recycled more often.

Our preference is to adopt a UK-wide approach to DRS if it is introduced. Waste and recycling policy is a devolved matter but we will continue to work closely with the Devolved Administrations on this policy area.

4.4 Developing measures to reduce the environmental impacts of disposable cups

Many of those who responded to the Government's call for evidence on single-use plastic waste highlighted disposable cups as a problem, highlighting that they are often not recycled due to their plastic lining and are often littered. The Government recognises this is a problem. As set out in the 2018 Budget, the Government has concluded that a levy on all disposable cups – for both hot and cold drinks – would not, at this point, deliver a decisive shift from disposable to reusable cups across all beverage types. Businesses are already taking steps to limit their environmental impact, but we expect industry to go further and will return to the issue if sufficient progress is not made.

In the meantime we will consider other options and our forthcoming consultations will consider whether or not we could drive further progress by:

- including disposable cups filled at the point of sale in a deposit return scheme;
- using the reformed packaging producer responsibility system to provide a strong incentive for business to provide cups that are easy to recycle;
- setting targets to encourage higher levels of recycling.

This list of potential options beyond a levy is not exhaustive – the Government wants to hear views on these and any other ideas to address this problem.

4.5 Delivering on the Greening Government Commitments, including removing consumer single-use plastics from our estate by 2020

The Greening Government Commitments (GGCs) require departments run their estates and operations more sustainably, and have already driven improvement. By 2020, departments must cut the proportion of waste sent to landfill to 10% or less of the total. They must also improve recycling and cut paper consumption. We are discussing future arrangements that commit government departments to make further, continuous improvements.

A key commitment is to remove consumer single-use plastics from central government buildings by 2020, with individual departments going faster and further where possible. This extends to our global operations, with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) announcing that they would eliminate the use of avoidable single-use plastics from UK operations by the end of 2018, and from global operations by 2020.

- 4.6** At the end of May 2019, the Government announced a series of controls on single use plastics to meet its pledge outlined at Paragraph 4.2. The measures cover plastic straws, plastic drinks stirrers and plastic cotton buds in England from April 2020 but only plastic drinks stirrers will be totally banned from sale - currently 316 million are used a year. The Government are effectively restricting the supply of the products covered with an acknowledgement that in limited circumstances, such as use by the disabled and in scientific laboratories, there is justification for their continued use. As a result, the Government estimate that the use of plastic straws alone will fall from around 4.7 billion to 44 million.

5.0 JOINT WASTE PARTNERSHIP

- 5.1** All members of the Joint Waste Committee have now put in place commitments to reduce and eradicate the use of SUP's within their own operations. In addition, the Joint Waste Committee continue to promote the hierarchy of waste management with the emphasis firmly on the favoured option of prevention or avoidance of production, particularly when it comes to SUP's.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1** None

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1** None

8.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

- 8.1** Procurement Strategy.

9.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

- 9.1** A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment.

10.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

- 10.1** None

11.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

11.1 The Council is playing its part in tackling the problem of SUP's so as to protect the natural environment.

12.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

12.1 None

13.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

13.1 Council – 24th July 2018

Background Papers: None

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Appendices: None