

**Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny  
Management Committee**

**11 March 2019**

Report of the Single-use Plastics Scrutiny Review Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee

**Single Use Plastics Scrutiny Review Final Report**

**Summary**

1. This report presents the Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee (CSMC) with all the information gathered by the Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee appointed to investigate the use and disposal of single use plastics in York, together with the Sub-Committee's conclusions and recommendations.

**Background**

2. In December 2017 Full Council considered a Motion around single use plastics and resolved that:
3. Council notes:
  - There are significant environmental problems with disposing of single use plastics, which release toxic chemicals when they break down, are a non-recyclable material and therefore a waste of energy and economic value, and also contribute significantly to waterway litter in York, which can then contribute to long lasting plastic pollution on beaches and in the marine environment.
  - The harmful effects this has on marine life and the increased amount of plastic entering the food chain.
  - Existing initiatives aimed at reducing the numbers of single use disposable coffee cups being used for take-away drinks, such as the 'Freiburg cup' and the York manufactured 'iamreusable' cup.
4. Council therefore:

- Requests the appropriate Scrutiny Committee to consider the merits of undertaking a scrutiny review in order to investigate the council's use of single use plastics in its buildings etc. and through its procurement arrangements, and how the behaviour of others may be influenced in relation to this particular form of pollution in support of the coalition's broader environmental policies. Options to reduce the use of single-use disposable cups in York should include working with Make it York (possibly via its new service level agreement with the Council) and the York Business Improvement District (BID) to reduce waste and tackle litter and rubbish collection challenges within the city centre.”
5. The resolution was originally considered by the Economy and Place Policy Development Committee which agreed to undertake a review, but before membership of a Task Group was finalised it became clear that this item should be considered by CSMC as part of the Motion is around developing the Council's procurement policy on plastic goods.
  6. At the June meeting of E&P Policy Development, Members agreed they wanted to pursue a joint Task Group approach to carrying out this review with CSMC and further agreed Cllrs Kramm and Richardson be on any joint Sub-Committee.
  7. This issue was first discussed by CSMC in June 2018 when it was agreed to convene a Joint Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee with E&P Policy Development Committee. However, the Committee also agreed to delegate authority to the Head of Civic and Democratic Services, in conjunction with the Chair and Vice-Chair, to prioritise the order and timing of review work given the shortages within the scrutiny team at the time and the fact that the Committee was already committed to two other scrutiny reviews.
  8. It was next considered at a meeting of this Committee in November 2018 when Cllrs Looker and Fenton were appointed to the Joint Ad Hoc Sub-Committee.
  9. The Sub-Committee met for the first time in late November when Cllr Fenton was appointed Chair. Members broadly discussed the information they would need to progress the review, who they wanted to consult with and agreed the following remit:

## **Remit**

### Aim:

To investigate the use and disposal of single use plastics in York, what measures can be taken to reduce the use of single use plastics in Council buildings and how these measures can influence city partners and businesses in helping reduce plastic pollution.

### Objectives:

- i. Examine the current Council policy in relation to single use plastics in its buildings;
- ii. Understand the current arrangements for recycling or reusing plastics for York residents;
- iii. Better understand what levers the Council has to reduce the use of single use plastics in food and drink outlets;
- iv. Liaise with York BID to understand what actions can be taken to reduce and better manage coffee cup disposal in York city centre;
- v. Engage with One Planet York to communicate to partners measures to reduce the use of single use plastics;
- vi. Look at best practices in other towns and cities.

## **Information Gathered**

10. In January the Sub-Committee met with officers from CYC Waste Management and Yorwaste to learn about the current arrangements for recycling or reusing plastics in York. Sub-Committee members noted that all households are provided with a fortnightly kerbside recycling collection. Within the city centre St Nicks operates smaller collection vehicles to negotiate narrower streets. This is a weekly recycling collection to c.2,420 households (2.76% of households) as part of a five-year contract.
11. Plastic recycling is complicated as while all plastic bottles are recyclable they have different polymers. Kerbside recycling should only involve plastic bottles; drinks and milk bottles; household cleaning, detergent and fabric conditioner bottles; toiletry bottles including make-up/cleanser, shampoo, conditioner and bubble bath bottles.

12. Other plastics, including plastic food wrapping; food trays and margarine tubs are mixed plastics and should not be put into kerbside recycling containers. Mixed plastics can be recycled in the public recycling banks which are provided and paid for by Sainsbury's, at their Monks Cross or Foss Island sites. Alternately, mixed plastics can be placed in a general household waste bin.
13. York uses the Allerton Waste Recovery Park (AWRP) to process its waste. AWRP is designed so domestic refuse goes through a mechanical treatment process to further separate recyclable material, such as metals and plastics. However, the sub-committee noted that Allerton Park is struggling to sell contaminated plastics.
14. The sub-committee agreed that for CYC to benefit it needed to encourage residents to recycle more plastic, but strategically the focus should be on banning certain types of plastics.
15. It was also noted that some other authorities ask their residents to put their refuse in one collection bin but this causes problems because it causes materials to become contaminated, it costs to separate the recyclable materials and ultimately it generates less revenue.
16. In early February 2019 the Sub-Committee met a representative of One Planet York to understand how OPY can help communicate to partners measures to reduce the use of single-use plastics.
17. One Planet York is a network of 65 organisations in the city which have pledged, among other things, to support an overarching framework of reducing waste, reusing where possible and ultimately sending zero waste to landfill. It was established as a light influencing body to communicate, inspire and encourage positive practices for a more sustainable and resilient city.
18. OPY organisations have already taken steps to eliminate disposal cups. University of York, for example, has introduced a reusable Yorcup scheme as an alternative to disposable cups. It has also replaced single-use plastic straws with paper straws, replaced black plastic coffee cup lids with white lids which can be recycled and encouraged students wanting takeaways from the dining hall to bring their own reusable food container to reduce the use of polystyrene boxes.
19. One Planet York is able to showcase what York organisations are doing to help promote a behaviour change through a peer influencing approach.

20. To satisfy Objective (iv) of the remit, to liaise with York BID to understand what actions can be taken to reduce and better manage coffee cup disposal in York city centre, the Sub-Committee was pleased to note that the BID is currently looking at solutions regarding this issue. The findings from their investigations will be reported to the BID Board in due course and shared with CYC scrutiny once all the relevant information has been collated.
21. On 15 February the Sub-Committee met CYC's Facilities Manager and the Category Manager Procurement to discuss the use of single-use plastics in Council buildings.
22. Members were pleased to note that lamreusable cups are now on sale at Cafe West at West Offices and people who used these, and other reusable drinks containers, are given a 10p discount on hot drinks bought at the cafe. The cafe had already introduced biodegradable takeaway cups which are fully compostable, including the lids, and is looking to provide a separate recycling bin for biodegradable and compostable products.
23. A bigger issue with the cafe is plastic cutlery. FM has looked at wooden cutlery as an alternative but this is about three times more expensive to buy and many people did not like the texture. Metal cutlery is available for people eating in the cafe, but not for those people buying takeaway food. When the cafe first opened metal cutlery was available for all customers, but stock disappeared. FM is now looking at the possibility of reintroducing metal cutlery at all West Office hubs which could be washed and replaced after use. There would be an initial increased cost of providing metal cutlery but if items are replaced after use this would be a one-off expense and would lead to a better outcome.
24. The Sub-Committee noted that much of the takeaway food at Cafe West, such as salads and some sandwiches, is sold in clear plastic containers, but further noted that the cafe is run by the charity United Response and a switch to suitable non-plastic containers might create a financial burden which would be difficult to manage.
25. FM is also looking at a 'nudge' campaign to raise awareness of the damage caused by single-use plastics with visuals around the building highlighting the impact single-use plastics are having on the environment.
26. The Sub-Committee learned that CYC procurement works within the Council's Social Values Policy which aims to increase sustainability. The

policy provides the Council with significant leverage to incentivise suppliers to be more sustainable in their practices and to encourage the organisations the Council buys from to be more environmentally aware.

27. If the Council was looking to buy something that is made of plastic and there were alternatives that fell within the Social Values Policy then procurement would stop and think about these alternatives. This could apply, for example, in catering contracts for schools and old people's homes. Some of this work is already being done with Council suppliers and through its wider supply chain.
28. In early 2018 the government ran a call for evidence, *Tackling the Plastic Problem*<sup>1</sup>, on how the tax system or charges could be used to reduce single-use plastic waste. This received 162,000 responses, demonstrating the strong public interest in tackling this issue.
29. This led to a Budget announcement published in October 2018<sup>2</sup> that the government will introduce a new tax on produced or imported plastic packaging. Subject to consultation, this will apply to all plastic packaging that doesn't include at least 30% recycled content.
30. Alongside already planned reforms to the Packaging Producer Responsibility System, this will encourage businesses to ensure that far more packaging can be recycled and to use more recycled plastic in their packaging. The government will consult on both reforms shortly.
31. Future revenues from the packaging tax and Packaging Producer Responsibility reforms will enable investment to address single-use plastics, waste and litter.
32. The Budget also announced £20 million to tackle plastics and boost recycling: £10 million more for plastics research and development and £10 million to pioneer innovative approaches to boosting recycling and reducing litter, such as smart bins.

## **Best Practice**

### Brighton and Hove City Council Single-Use Plastics Policy

33. To support Brighton and Hove becoming a single-use plastics free city, the council commits to:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tackling-the-plastic-problem>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/single-use-plastics-budget-2018-brief>

- Work with staff to ensure that single-use plastics are eliminated across our offices
- Support our schools and communities in their efforts to make their buildings plastic-free zones
- Through The Living Coast Biosphere programme, communicate the importance of protecting our urban, rural and marine environments, and support and promote positive initiatives, city campaigns and actions for reducing plastic waste
- Work with our event organisers to eliminate single-use plastics across all city events held on council land and share guidance for this more widely
- Support communities and litter-pick initiatives to ensure our parks, beaches and open spaces are free from plastic litter
- Use government legislation that regulates against the use of single-use plastics to support our efforts where we can
- Require all our suppliers to minimise the use of single-use plastics in their service provision and find sustainable alternatives (where appropriate)
- Where the use of plastics is unavoidable, the council will encourage the use of recycled plastics, where practicable, and support manufacturers that make products from locally sourced waste plastics
- Work with partners in joint ventures and innovative projects for reducing single-use plastic waste
- Share best practice and information about plastic free initiatives, to residents, businesses, visitors and beyond through the council's social media and communication channels

34. Brighton and Hove City Council will work to embed these commitments into the sustainable events guidance, sustainable procurement policy, and into other key council strategies, policies and plans.

### Plymouth

35. In June 2018 it was announced that Plymouth was the first UK city to be accredited by the global charity Surfers Against Sewage with Plastic Free Communities status for its waterfront district.
36. More than 70 business pioneers and 50 community ambassadors in Plymouth including local businesses, schools and community groups,

supported the city's bid by pledging to reduce the amount of single use plastics they consume.

37. Plymouth City Council has reacted to the recent European Parliament vote to ban single-use plastics by 2021 by saying that the city will not be waiting that long to make further efforts to stop polluting the oceans with items such as tea stirrers, straws, plastic bags and water bottles.
38. The Council is working with partners on the Plymouth, Britain's Ocean City Plastics Taskforce to implement a ban in the city by 2020, starting with a voluntary code of conduct.
39. In addition, all the Council's buildings will go single-use plastic free by September 2019 and all events on Plymouth City Council land will be required to complete an Environmental Assessment to show how single-use plastic will be eliminated, replaced by alternatives, or at the very least, reduced to an absolute minimum.

#### Surrey County Council Single-Use Plastics (SUP) Policy

40. SCC is strongly committed to take responsibility for tackling the plastic waste problem both within its local area and across the UK. With this in mind, SCC has urged the Government to bring forward the 2014 date in their target of "achieving zero avoidable plastic waste".
41. SCC is initially focusing on eliminating the use of plastic drinks bottles, plastic food takeaway boxes, plastic cutlery, disposable coffee cups, plastic drinks bottle caps, straws, stirrers and plastic lids. Its commitment for supporting Surrey to become SUP free includes:
  - End the sale and provision of SUP products in order to phase out SUP use across SCC estate and operations wherever possible.
  - Ensure the procurement policy and procedures require all suppliers to reduce and work towards zero avoidable SUP use (wherever possible) including jointly with partners through ORBIS and at SCC run events.
  - Support greater awareness and action from our suppliers and contractors in finding sustainable SUP replacements wherever appropriate and encourage higher recycling rates across SCC estates.
  - Share best practice, raise awareness, and support SCC staff, partners, communities, schools, district and borough councils, businesses and beyond towards making their own locations avoidable plastic-free zones.



- Work with all stakeholders including district and boroughs, schools, communities and businesses to promote, support and innovate to reduce SUP across Surrey.

### Bristol City Council

42. Bristol City Council proposed itself “single-use plastic free” in 2016 and set out to develop a strategy to encourage and enable the city’s institutions, businesses and citizens to adopt similar measures. Specifically the Council would:

- End all sales of SUP bottles in council buildings and phase out their use at all events hosted in Council-owned buildings, both public and private.
- End the use of other SUP products in council buildings starting with (but not limited to) ‘disposable’ cups, cutlery and drinking straws.
- Ensure reusable and affordable food containers are available for sale in public markets – to be piloted at St Nicholas market in the city centre.
- Work with the Festivals Team to create policy in which single-use ‘disposable’ plastic cups are replaced at all city festivals with reusable or deposit-scheme cups. This will ultimately be a condition for obtaining a licence for large scale events.
- Work with tenants in commercial properties owned by the Council to phase out SUP glasses, bottles, cutlery and straws and help them to engage with Bristol’s existing ‘Go Green’ scheme.
- Work with bars and cafes, starting with those situated on the harbour-side, to phase out single-use ‘disposable’ cups and to encourage the use of reusable and deposit scheme ones.
- Encourage, enable and aid all employees and councillors to engage with the Plastic Free July challenge.
- Work with existing local groups and experts to implement these changes.”

### Oxford City Council

43. Earlier this year Oxford City Council committed to working to bring an end to the use of unnecessary single-use plastics in the city. In April 2018 the Council resolved to request the Executive Director for Sustainable City brings a report to City Executive Board on the options for bringing an end to the use of unnecessary Single Use Plastics (SUP) in Oxford, to:

- enable Oxford City Council to become a full signatory of the 'Plastic Free Pledge', by phasing out the use of unnecessary SUPs in all City Council buildings, and working with commissioning partners to end the purchase and procurement of SUPs through the Council's supply chain;
- encourage the city's businesses, organisations and residents to go 'plastic free,' working with best practice partners in the city to explore the creation of a 'plastic free network,' that could provide business support, practical guidelines and advice to help local businesses transition from SUPs to sustainable alternatives;
- provide feasible options to incentivise traders on Council land to sell re-usable containers and invite customers to bring their own, with the aim of phasing out SUPs; including investigating the possibility of requiring food and drink vendors to avoid SUPs as a condition of their event permission, strengthening the existing conditions and guidance circulated to exhibitors and traders.

#### Birmingham City Council

44. In September 2018 Birmingham City Council called for action at city level to make a significant contribution to reducing disposal of plastics and cleaning up the environment. The Council resolved to call on the Executive to ask the Transport and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee to explore the opportunities and the options available to the City so it can become a Plastic Free City. The Scrutiny Committee will report back by the end of the 2018/19 Municipal Year a range of options, including cost neutral options, which the Executive can implement as soon as possible from the start of the 2019/20 Municipal Year. These options to include:

- Encouraging the city's institutions, businesses and citizens to adopt measures to minimise the use of single-use plastic products.
- Immediately starting the process of reducing the sale and provision of single-use plastic products such as bottles, cups, cutlery and drinking straws in Council buildings where it is reasonable to do so.
- Encouraging market traders to sell re-usable containers and inviting customers to bring their own, with the aim of phasing out single-use plastic containers and cutlery on market stalls.
- Working with the Council events team and creating a policy in which single-use "disposable" plastic cups are replaced at all large

city festivals with re-usable or deposit scheme cups and which the release of balloons on City Council property is not permitted, investigating the possibility of ultimately making these a condition for obtaining a licence for large scale events held in the city.

- Promoting refill schemes with retail businesses and Business Improvement Districts.
- Investigating the possibility of installing free water fountains in City Council reception areas and elsewhere in our buildings.
- Further investigating having locally branded water containers for sale.
- Encouraging the city's businesses, organisations and residents to go 'plastic free,' working with best practice partners in the city to explore the creation of a 'plastic free network,' that could provide business support, practical guidelines and advice to help local businesses transition from SUPs to sustainable alternatives;
- Working with tenants in commercial properties owned by Birmingham City Council to encourage the phasing out of disposable plastic cups, bottles, cutlery and straws.
- Ensuring that sustainability is a key feature of the 2022 Commonwealth Games and commit to working with the LOC and Games partners to minimise the use of single use plastic items.
- Ensuring that all Local Authority Maintained Schools are part of a new City Council initiative to help them become plastic-free working with partners such as City Serve and Veolia.
- Encouraging, enabling and aiding all City Council employees, Councillors, businesses, community groups, and citizens to engage with an annual Plastic Free Challenge Month to be launched in April 2019.
- Writing to all major supermarkets trading in the city encouraging them to introduce plastic free aisles.

45. Working with Procurement services to encourage all businesses with which the Council has contracts to support the banning of single-use plastics in their place of work and consider the possibility of phasing out of single-use plastics in the awarding of new contracts where this is relevant and proportionate.

## **Analysis**

46. The use of plastics and its impact on the environment has been a topic nationally and internationally for many years. In 2015 the Government introduced a law requiring large shops to introduce a 5p charge for

single-use plastic bags. Following the scheme's introduction the sales of plastic bags reduced by 83 per cent, demonstrating that intervention can have an impact on behaviours.

47. Programmes such as Blue Planet II and images in the media have increased the focus and there is scientific evidence of the growing impact on oceans and seas, and other eco-systems, of the build up and permanence of plastics.
48. Plastic waste often does not decompose and can last centuries in landfill, or else ends up littering the streets or polluting the natural environment.
49. Each year we use 2.26 million tonnes of plastic packaging in the UK, with only 842 tonnes being recycled. The vast majority of this packaging is made from new plastic, rather than recycled material. This is because recycled plastic is often more expensive than new plastic, despite its lower environmental impacts.
50. At the moment in York plastic bottles are the only plastic material officially accepted in our kerbside recycling collection. They are made of high grade plastic material PET1 (Polyethylene Terephthalate) and HDPE2 (High Density Polyethylene) which have consistently strong recycling markets in which to sell the material.
51. Mixed plastic, however, can be poorer quality and dirty. These factors, coupled with the instability of the recycling markets, has meant that it has previously not been possible to consider introducing mixed plastics to the existing kerbside recycling collection. However, some mixed plastic is already put into the recycling boxes by residents and Yorwaste collects it.
52. Black plastic doesn't reflect light, so can not be seen and sorted by the scanners in the recycling facility and could end up contaminating other materials such as glass bottles.

## **Consultation**

53. In gathering the information in this final report the Sub-Committee has consulted with CYC Waste Management and Yorwaste, CYC Facilities Management and Procurement, One Planet York and York Business Improvement District. It has also taken into account best practices adopted by other local authorities and considered Government measures to reduce the use of single-use plastics.

## **Conclusions**

54. The environmental impact of plastics and in particular single-use plastic is a national and international issue and the benefits for the local environment from efforts to reduce it should be supported. The drivers for reducing single-use plastics are environmental, economic and health.
55. City of York Council can do little in isolation, but by demonstrating a determination to work towards eliminating the use of single-use plastics in its own building and on Council-owned land it can set an example to businesses, organisations and residents and encourage them to do likewise.
56. Then, as a participant in the One Planet York initiative, the Council can communicate the importance of protecting our urban, rural and riverside environments and support and promote initiatives and actions for reducing plastic waste.

## **Review Recommendations**

57. After considering the information provided in this final report, CSMC is asked to recommend that:
  - i. CYC Facilities Management:
    - a) continue to work with United Response to explore options to replace disposable plastic food containers (such as those used for sandwiches and salads) with more environmentally friendly alternatives
    - b) undertakes a trial whereby metal cutlery is made available in West Office hubs and the cafe as an alternative to disposable plastic cutlery
    - c) works with Communications colleagues to prepare and distribute publicity materials encouraging CYC staff to reduce their use of single-use plastics
    - d) considers options for expanding the range of recyclable materials collected at West Offices, for example through dedicated bins for biodegradable / compostable coffee cups and crisp packets

- ii. CYC Procurement, through the implementation of the Council's Social Values Policy, strives to minimise the procurement of single-use plastics
- iii. The Council:
  - a) Works with partners such as Make It York to explore options for reducing the use of single-use plastic cups and food trays at events held on Council land
  - b) Continues to liaise with York BID to explore opportunities to reduce the use of disposable coffee cups in the city centre and provide better disposal facilities, noting that the BID are currently looking at options on these issues
  - c) Through its role as a participant in the One Planet York initiative:
    - Learns from and shares information and best practice on reduction of single-use plastics with partners in the city such as educational establishments and businesses;
    - Makes use of available communication channels to share information with residents on ways in which they can reduce single-use plastics and make full use of recycling opportunities.
- iv. CYC Waste Services to continue to work with Yorwaste and St Nicks to explore options for increasing the number and types of single-use plastics that can be collected for which there are practicable recycling opportunities.

## **Council Plan**

58. This report is linked to A Prosperous City for All priority in the Council Plan which highlights that environmental stability underpins everything we do, seeks to increase the percentage of waste recycled and works towards plans for One Planet living.

## **Implications**

59. **Financial:** The cost of providing metal cutlery in West Office hubs and the cafe would have financial implications on FM as there would be a

one-off outlay to buy this cutlery. However, if staff are responsible in returning their cutlery after use it could result in a long-term saving as FM would no longer need to regularly buy plastic cutlery. FM is currently awaiting estimates for the cost of bulk buying metal cutlery.

- **Human Resources (HR)** There are no HR implications associated with the recommendations in this report.
- **Equalities** There are no equalities implications
- **Legal** There are no legal implications
- **Crime and Disorder** There are no crime and disorder implications
- **Information Technology (IT)** There are no IT implications
- **Property** There are no property implications
- **Other** There are no other implications

### **Risk Management**

60. There are no risks associated with the recommendations in this report. However, the risk of doing nothing could lead to further damage to the urban, rural and marine environments, not just locally but nationally and internationally.

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**Wards Affected:**

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

## **Abbreviations**

AWRP – Allerton Waste Recovery Park

BID – Business Improvement District

CSMC – Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee

CYC – City of York Council

E&P – Economy and Place

FM – Facilities management

HDPE2 – High Density Polyethylene

OPY – One Planet York

PET1 – Polyethylene Terephthalate)

SCC – Surrey County Council

SUP – Single-Use Plastics