

TITLE OF REPORT: Proposals to reduce plastic waste within the Council

REPORT OF: Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides an update on the Council's approach to reduce the volume of single use plastics and makes recommendations to further reduce plastic waste within the Council.

Background

2. The issue around single use plastics has recently been raised at an Environment and Transport Portfolio meeting following the Blue Planet TV series and officers have been asked to look at what can be done to reduce plastic waste in general.
3. Officers have worked with NEPO to develop an approach to reducing single use plastics in all NEPO contracts for goods and services, many of which are used by the Council.
4. Central Government have recently proposed plans to ban the distribution and sale of plastic straws, drinks stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds, which will come into effect from 1 April 2020.
5. There are many examples of work that has already been carried out to reduce the volume of plastics used in the delivery of Council services, thus minimising waste as set out in Appendix 1.

Proposal

6. The Council's Traded Services continue to plan how they may reduce plastic waste further and they have come up with the following proposals:
 - Strengthen the wording in the Council's Corporate Social Responsibility Pledge as set out in appendix 1.
 - All future tenders will continue to seek alternatives to disposable plastic products and require the minimisation of the use of packaging that cannot be recycled.
 - Re-usable cups made from rice husks are available to purchase in Bewicks and other catering outlets managed by the Council and have been very popular with employees and other customers who

are incentivised to bring along re-useable cups through a discount scheme.

- Work with our suppliers and NEPO to explore new products and alternatives to plastics.
7. The recently tendered contract for vending machines has secured a range of commitments from suppliers as set out in appendix 2, which are currently in the process of being implemented.
 8. The UK Plastics Pact is a trailblazing, collaborative initiative that will create a circular economy for plastics. Established by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), it brings together organisations from across the plastics value chain with UK Government to tackle the scourge of plastic waste. Links to their website can be found here <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/the-uk-plastics-pact> and the key targets are set out in appendix 1.
 9. In order to ensure that all future procurements require suppliers to minimise unnecessary single use plastics a procurement protocol will be implemented, please see appendix 3.

Recommendations

10. It is recommended that:
 - (i) The proposals set out in paragraphs 6 continue to be implemented.
 - (ii) The Council be recommended to sign up to the UK Plastics Pact.
 - (iii) The Council be recommended to amend its Corporate Social Responsibility Pledge to encourage the Council's supply chain to also sign up to the UK Plastics Pact.
 - (iv) The Council be recommended to approve the implementation of the procurement protocol as set out in appendix 3 to the report.

For the following reason:

To minimise the use of single plastics within the Council and across the borough.

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Policy Context

1. On 20th March 2018, Cabinet approved a Corporate Social Responsibility Pledge to ensure that our supply chain supports us to help the people of Gateshead to thrive. Within our Corporate Social Responsibility Pledge, there are references to the Council and its supply chain:
 - (i) reducing its environmental impact on future generations;
 - (ii) managing waste responsibly by promoting re-use, remanufacture, recycling;
 - (iii) and minimising the use of packaging,however, there is nothing specific within the Pledge that focuses on reducing **plastic** waste.

Background

2. Globally, it is estimated that more than 8 million tons of plastic are dumped in the oceans every year, over half of which are disposable plastics used once for convenience. The issue around single use plastics has recently been raised at an Environment and Transport Portfolio meeting following the Blue Planet TV series and officers have been asked to look at what can be done to reduce plastic waste in general.
3. Most of the Council's usages of single use plastics are used through the Council's traded services, catering and building cleaning. They are mainly used for packaging and vending. It is therefore important to ensure that there are no unintended consequences resulting from minimising single use plastics such as additional, or higher costs to customers that may impact on the services competitiveness and jeopardise the future of our traded services.
4. The Council has, over the years, taken a number of steps to minimise plastic waste and examples of this include:
 - The vending machines use paper cups and the machines are also able to vend into re-usable cups.
 - Phasing out of stand-alone water dispensers in Council offices, where appropriate, in favour of promoting the use of water being dispensed by taps in kitchen areas. We are also currently exploring the feasibility of installing a number of additional mains fed water dispensers throughout the Civic Centre for use by staff and the public, and we will be encouraging the use of reusable bottles as appropriate.
 - Water is served in refillable jugs for all Council meetings where water is provided.

- Ensuring that it is easy for employees to recycle plastic bottles by providing dedicated recycling bins at each workplace.
 - Plastic knives and forks have been phased out in Bewicks and other catering outlets managed by the Council and replaced with wooden knives and forks. Single use plastic cups will be phased out and replaced with an alternative.
 - A number of “veg-ware” products which look like plastic but are made from vegetable bi-products and are fully bi-degradable, have been introduced in our catering outlets and this will continue subject to being affordable.
 - School catering has minimised the use of disposable packaging and it also provides re-usable plastic trays and plates in most of the schools that it contracts with. It also recycles all necessary packaging on site and encourages pupils to recycle too.
 - Within our Building Cleaning Services, we have invested in chemical free cleaning where possible and this has massively reduced the volume of plastic packaging and plastic containers used to supply cleaning materials at specific sites.
 - For sites where chemical free cleaning is not viable we are looking at new products that do not use plastic packaging and come in concentrated capsule form which is then converted into a solution (similar to dishwasher tablets)
 - All of our buffing pads are made from recycled plastics.
 - Within all our traded services we adhere to segregated waste or designated recycling arrangements, including those for plastics, where they have been put in place by our customers.
 - Our photocopier paper packaging is paper based rather than made from plastic.
5. In October 2018, the Government set out plans to ban the distribution and sale of plastic straws, drinks stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds. In England, it is estimated that annually we use 4.7 billion plastic straws, 316 million plastic stirrers and 1.8 billion plastic-stemmed cotton buds. In 2019, following overwhelming support to the consultation proposals, the Government subsequently confirmed that a ban on these items in England will come into effect from 1 April 2020. However, the government has recognised that there are instances where using plastic straws are necessary for medical needs or some disabilities and the ban also includes some exemptions that will enable plastic straws to continue to be used in certain situations or on request.
6. The Government is also looking at further ways to reduce avoidable waste and recycle more as part of the Resource and Waste Strategy which was published in late 2018, including stimulating demand for recycled plastic by introducing a tax on plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled plastic, banning plastics products where there is a clear case for it and alternatives exist and addressing barriers to reuse. There are many more proposals set out in the 146 page document which are subject to further consultation.

7. The European Parliament also voted and backed a “complete ban on a range of single use plastics across the union including plastic cutlery, plates, cotton buds, straws, drink stirrers and balloon sticks. The EU hopes it will be effective from 2021 and the UK will have incorporated the rules into national law if the ban becomes a fully-fledged directive before the end of a Brexit transition period.
8. The Council procures many of the commodities that it uses via arrangements put in place by NEPO (North Eastern Procurement Organisation). In response from requests by member authorities including Gateshead NEPO has recently issued questionnaires to 30 key suppliers to identify what steps they are taking to reduce single use plastics. Of the nine responses that NEPO received 5 had policies in place and are already providing the authorities with single use plastics, 6 had set targets within their own organisation to reduce single use plastics, 7 included criteria within their Corporate Social Responsibility arrangements and one had signed up to a single use plastics pledge.

Proposals

9. The Council’s Traded Services continue to plan how they may reduce plastic waste further and they have come up with the following proposals:
 - All future tenders will continue to seek alternatives to disposable plastic products and require the minimisation of the use of packaging that cannot be recycled.
 - Plastic straws and stirrers will be removed from all of the Council’s catering outlets.
 - Re-usable cups made from rice husks are available to purchase in Bewicks and other catering outlets managed by the Council and have been very popular with employees and other customers who are incentivised to bring along re-useable cups through a discount scheme.
 - Work with our suppliers and NEPO to explore new products and alternatives to plastics.

The UK Plastics Pact

10. WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme) is a national charitable organisation that works with government, businesses and communities to deliver practical solutions to improve resource efficiency. They have recently launched a new initiative called the UK Plastics Pact that they would like organisations such as the Council to sign up to.
11. The UK Plastics Pact is a trailblazing, collaborative initiative that will create a circular economy for plastics. It brings together businesses from across the entire plastics value chain with UK governments to tackle the scourge of plastic waste. It is proposed that the Council signs

up to the UK Plastics Pact and that the Council's supply chain is also encouraged to do the same via the Corporate Social Responsibility Pledge

12. Links to the website can be found here <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/the-uk-plastics-pact> and the key targets are set out below:

By 2025, the UK Plastics Pact will transform the UK Plastic packaging sector by meeting four world-leading targets:

- *100% of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable*
- *70% of plastic packaging effectively recycled or composted*
- *30% average recycled content across all plastic packaging*
- *Eliminate single use plastics by taking action to eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use packaging items through redesign, innovation or alternative (re-use) delivery models*

A roadmap to achieving these targets has also been published.

Domestic Waste

13. In terms of disposal of domestic waste on behalf of Gateshead residents the following information may be of interest to Councillors:
- a) Across Gateshead, residents can recycle a wide range of plastic household materials as part of the 'blue bin' kerbside collection service. This includes plastic pots, tubs, and trays (such as yoghurt pots, ice cream tubs, and pre-packaged food trays), as well as a range of plastic bottles, including containers for drinks and other household items, such as shampoos and detergents. Communal recycling facilities replicate the same service to residents from multi-occupancy dwellings such as high-rise flats.
 - b) Plastic materials collected through the blue bin service are transported to a materials recovery facility where they are separated and processed for onward recycling by an external contractor. In 2018/19, 13,080 tonnes of comingled dry mixed recyclable materials were collected on the council's blue bin service, of which approximately 10% (or 1,265 tonnes) were recovered plastic materials such as plastic bottles and pots, tubs and trays.
 - c) However, not all residents dispose of their plastic waste through the blue bin service, so some plastics will be within their general waste bins. This has been estimated at around 15% of the general waste received. In Gateshead, all general waste is incinerated at our energy-from-waste facility, where it is used to create super-heated steam that powers a turbine to create electricity for the national grid.

- d) A key issue in terms of the last two bullet points, therefore, is that all plastic collected within household waste collections are either recycled or incinerated for energy recovery. The council has not needed to landfill any household waste since April 2015.
- e) To further improve recycling performance, Gateshead Council (through South Tyne and Wear Waste Management Partnership), introduced a community education and engagement programme, that targets local community groups and schools. It is aimed at raising awareness of the waste services available to them, to inform them about the 'waste hierarchy', and encourage them to become responsible recyclers. Since the programme began in April 2014, over 4,800 Gateshead residents have participated in waste-awareness events and workshops.

Consultation

- 14. Consultation has taken place with other Councils across the country via the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) to explore what other authorities are doing to reduce their use of plastics. The consultation revealed that the authorities who replied are doing what the Council has done already or is planning to do in the future. There was limited learning from this consultation.

Alternative Options

- 15. Despite the current debate relating to plastics there are still valid reasons and advantages for its continued use. Plastics in use in the food industry are light, strong, durable, improve the shelf life of products, protect products by allowing them to be air tight, and are essential for food safety. Many plastics in circulation in the catering industry are not single use – they can be recycled multiple times and they help to reduce the need for virgin material by being recycled. Council services should ensure that where they do use plastics they can be, and are, recycled. A final consideration should be in relation to carbon footprint – plastics often have a lower carbon footprint than some alternatives currently available.

Implications of Recommended Option

- 16. **Resources:**
 - a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms the proposals have minimal financial implications.
 - b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no Human Resources implications.

- c) Property Implications** - There are no property implications.
17. **Risk Management Implication** - There are no risk management implications
18. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - There are no equality and diversity implications
19. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no crime and disorder implications
20. **Health Implications** – There are no health implications
21. **Sustainability Implications** - The recommendations will help to minimise the use of single use plastics
22. **Human Rights Implications** – There are no Human Rights implications
23. **Area and Ward Implications** - There are no area and ward implications

Background Information – information relied on in preparation of this report includes information on the WRAP web pages, tenders submitted by providers, information published on the Government/Environment web site and responses to consultation obtained via APSE, the Government publication, “Our waste, our resources: A strategy for England”.

Commitments from tenderers

The most recent tender processes that the Council has undertaken have secured the following commitments from our suppliers:

Templeman Retailing and Vending Limited (TRV) - Hot Drinks and Snacks Machines

- All hot drinks machines will vend paper cups.
- All of TRV's packaging, cardboard, and paper waste is collected and recycled in full by locally based specialist recycling company Riverdale Paper Ltd. Riverdale are also based locally on Team Valley Gateshead and collect all of TRV's recyclable paper waste twice per week. TRV's operators are instructed to return all waste paper & cardboard packaging to Team Valley for recycling as detailed above.
- TRV's plastic use is very minimal, however all plastics used from product packaging etc are placed within a dedicated plastic skip and collected by a specialist plastic recycling contractor who processes and recycles the material in full.
- TRV are committed to working with all suppliers to reduce plastic waste where possible.

Coca-Cola – Soft Drinks Vending Machines (taken from the Coca-Cola Sustainability Action Plan)

- We'll collect all of our packaging so that none of it ends up as Litter or in the Oceans.
- We'll make sure that 100% of our packaging is recyclable
- We'll work with local and national partners to collect 100% of our packaging in Western Europe
- We'll make sure that at least 50% of the material we use for our PET bottles comes from recycled plastic.
- We'll use the reach of our brands to inspire everyone to recycle.
- We'll lead the way in pioneering sustainable packaging – including renewable materials and smart new ways to reduce packaging waste
- *Baseline 2010 and target date is 2025*

Coca-Cola Sustainable Packaging

- Plastic Bottles use up 29% of the packs Coca-Cola sell. The Plastic they use is light, safe, hygienic, need very little energy to produce and are 100% recyclable when properly collected.
- Bottles weigh half of what they did in 1994.
- All PET bottles are 100% recyclable and contain 25% recycled plastic sourced from a plant in Lincolnshire
- 74% of plastic drinks bottles are collected for recycling in GB.

Coca-Cola Future Promise

- Coca-Cola will ensure packaging is sustainable, by 2020 all plastic bottles are to contain 50% recycled PET by 2020
- Coca-Cola are running campaigns and Partnerships with Keep Britain Tidy, Keep Scotland Beautiful and Keep Wales Tidy
- Champion new ways to improve the recycling of packaging and reduce litter; including better recycling for on-the-go packaging and Deposit Schemes.

PROTOCOL FOR MINIMISING SINGLE USE PLASTICS

Version 1

1. Background

- 1.1 This protocol describes the procedure to be followed to minimise single use plastics.
- 1.2 Globally it is estimated that more than 8 million tons of plastic are dumped in the oceans every year, over half of which are disposable plastics used once for convenience. The Council has made a commitment to minimise and where possible eliminate single use plastics in all service delivery and to encourage partners and suppliers to do the same.

2. Scope & Responsibilities

- 2.1 The Council requires that this protocol is followed for all procurements for goods, services and works.
- 2.2 When developing a specification consideration will be given to minimising the use of single use plastics wherever possible. Where alternatives can be used and are appropriate, they should be specified.
- 2.3 As a minimum, within all quotation and tender processes suppliers should be asked and evaluated on the following:
- *To identify single use plastics will be used in the delivery of the contract, including packaging*
 - *What steps they are taking to reduce and/or eliminate them.*
 - *Whether plastic packaging used in the delivery of goods, services or works comprises 30% or more recycled plastic*
 - *What process they have in place to increase volumes of re-usable or recyclable plastics*
- 2.4 The following single use plastic goods will not be used in the delivery of services either by the Council, it's contractors or sub-contractors with immediate effect:
- Nonrecyclable drinks vending cups
 - Straws/milk carton straws
 - Water cups

- Plastic cutlery
- Plastic stirrers

2.5 The following single use plastic goods are more difficult to replace and work is progressing with suppliers to find alternatives; however they will not be used in the delivery of services either by the Council, it's contractors or sub-contractors with effect from 1 January 2021:

- Food containers
- Soft drinks bottles

2.6 Officers will continue to work with suppliers to minimise single-use plastics and also encourage them to sign up to the UK Plastics Pact.

2.7 Any queries on the implementation of this procurement protocol should be raised with Andrea Tickner, Service Director, Corporate Commissioning and Procurement andreatickner@gateshead.gov.uk