

## ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

26 NOVEMBER 2019

### Single use plastic update

**Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Luke Taylor, Cabinet Member for the Environment and Climate Change

**Responsible Officer:** Clare Robathan, Policy and Research Officer

**Reason for Report:** To provide an update on the implementation of Motion 549 (Cllr B Evans - 8th June 2018), which aims to phase out the use of Single Use Plastics (SUPs) by the Council.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):** That the PDG considers the update to the March report and agrees to continue to monitor progress on reduction of single use plastic.

### Relationship to Corporate Plan:

Priority 4: Environment

Aim 1 - Increase recycling and reduce the amount of waste

Aim 2 - Reduce our carbon footprint

Aim 3 - Protect the natural environment

**Financial Implications:** An increase in plastic being recycled may increase revenue from recycling.

**Legal Implications:** None

**Risk Assessment:** The alternative is not to act on single use plastics (SUPs), which would contribute to the degradation of the environment and accumulation of plastics, particularly in the sea. This could result in increased costs associated with cleaning up discarded SUPs.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** Not applicable.

**Impact on Climate Change:** The actions by the Council detailed below will enable the Authority to continue to enhance its environmental performance and contribute towards the delivery of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

### 1.0 Background

- 1.1 Plastic waste is one of the planet's greatest environmental challenges. Plastic waste is having a devastating effect on our oceans' biodiversity and overall sustainability.
- 1.2 Single use plastics, also known as disposable plastics, are items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled, including: containers, plastic cutlery, drink containers, food packaging, straws, plastic lids, stirrers and grocery bags.

- 1.3 A report was presented to the Environment PDG by the previous Scrutiny Officer in March 2019 outlining the progress the Council had made on phasing out SUPs within Council premises. This report provides a further update on actions taken by the Council, it covers:
- Getting our own house in order – actions taken by the Council to ensure premises are free from SUPs;
  - Working with suppliers – actions taken by the Council to understand and work with suppliers to reduce their use of SUPs; and
  - Raising awareness/helping the District to take action.

## **2.0 Getting our own house in order**

- 2.1 The main source of single use plastic used by the Council comes from food and beverage packaging and tableware. This type of plastic is commonly found along our coastlines and discarded in our countryside.
- 2.2 In advance of the March 2019 meeting, a review was undertaken of the Council's single use plastic food and beverage packaging and tableware, including consideration of whether a viable alternative exists for each item, or an environmentally-sound recycling or disposal method.
- 2.3 That review confirmed that:
- The Council has removed plastic cups from all meeting rooms. Staff and Member meetings now use china cups. Recyclable paper cups are available for large public meetings.
  - Leisure management have engaged with cafes in operation at Exe Valley and Lords Meadow to review their products and practices. Compostable cups are being used, except in Culm Valley where suppliers are being identified. Exe Valley is using paper bags, cardboard cup holders, wooden stirrers, wooden knives, forks and spoons and some veg ware packaging.
  - Mid Devon Leisure are looking at ways of maximising the collection of drink bottles at their centres.
  - In Public Health and Regulatory Services Plastic specimen containers are sterilised and re-used.
  - Building Services have taken steps to increase waste segregation, with a view to recycling as much plastic waste as possible e.g. PVC sheets are now recycled.
  - The Council has worked with Street Scene and Leisure to increase recycling and provide new bins.

## **2.4 Update**

- 2.5 The contract for water coolers is up for review in January 2020. The requirements going forward will be to only have plumbed units (rather than bottles) with fully bio degradable filters and packaging.
- 2.6 Mid Devon Leisure have continued to work with the companies and their suppliers in moving towards alternatives or replacements for SUPs. Exe Valley café, Elsie May's, confirmed that they now use Vegware for all takeaway cups and smoothie cups. In addition, their milkshake suppliers have moved to Vegware cups and paper straws.

2.7 Camper Coffee at Lords Meadow Leisure Centre now have a full range of environmental products and have replaced bottled water with canned water. Lord Meadow also sell reusable bottles, which customers can purchase for £2 and fill with water at the water fountains. Recycling bins have also been installed to encourage customers to recycle. Mid Devon Leisure has also confirmed that cafes are recycling their plastic waste.

### **3.0 Working with Suppliers**

3.1 We have been working with suppliers to minimise our consumption of single use plastic, and encourage them to do the same.

3.2 At the March meeting it was reported that letters had been sent to all suppliers (177 in total) asking them to complete a survey about their usage of single use plastics. The intention was to gather information about company plans and encourage further dialogue between Council and companies on the issue.

3.3 As a result of our survey we have had a response from 47 suppliers outlining their policy around SUPs. Some key findings from the survey are:

- Of those that responded, 25 (53%) currently have a SUP policy or plan within their business, 20 of those include a policy within their supply chain.
- Of those that do not have a policy, 17 intend to have a policy within the next two years.
- Therefore, 42 of the 47 (89%) suppliers that responded either have, or intend to have, a SUP policy or plan within their business. (Three of the responses outlined that, due to the nature of their business, an SUP policy was not applicable to their business).
- 26 (55%) of those that responded are actively seeking alternatives to plastic in the design and manufacturing of their products, and 31 (66%) are actively seeking alternatives and removing plastic packaging from products.

3.4 Although we would have liked the response rate to be higher, it is encouraging to see that suppliers are minimising the consumption of single use plastic where possible and looking for alternatives. We will now ensure procurement specifications and contractors' activities consider, and where practical minimise, the environmental risks associated with plastics. We will update our procurement tools to include an explicit reference to plastic, and raise awareness of plastic issues with procurement officers.

3.5 Additionally, Building Services has written to building product suppliers outlining that we have signed up to a pledge to reduce single use plastics and asked them to support this. As a result, a number of companies have provided us with their environmental policies and we will continue to work to promote the reduction of SUPs with Building Service suppliers.

### **4.0 Raising awareness/helping the District to take action**

4.1 The Council uses social media and communication tools to promote ways of reducing the use of SUPs, particularly through sharing other organisations posts. For example, in September, the Council promoted Recycle Devon's campaign on the use of reusable carrier bags over single use plastic bags,

using the hashtags #ReduceSingleUsePlastics and #Reuse. We are also part of a Devon wide communications and waste/recycling group which meets regularly to share ideas on reducing the use of plastic, amongst other things.

- 4.2 District Events on council owned land and property: In order to reduce the use of SUPs in the District, the Council does not allow SUPs at events on Council owned land and property (excluding legitimate use of a Council premises by a tenant in one of our commercial buildings or a Council house). This is regulated through the events process.
- 4.3 Tiverton Pannier Market has been working to increase levels of recycling and reduce the use of SUPs in the market. The Market has a five year Environmental Strategy (2017-2022), and has been actively working with traders to instigate a 'green market' where waste is minimal and recycling is the norm. In line with the Council's objectives for the environment, the Market is committed to:
- Increasing recycling and reducing waste (in particular plastic);
  - Reducing its carbon footprint; and
  - Protecting the natural environment.
- 4.4 Most market produce is free from packaging, with limited plastic used where necessary for health/hygiene reasons. Meat producers are encouraged to use butcher paper instead of Styrofoam to wrap produce and the Market requests all participating traders to use food containers, packaging, plates and cutlery made from biodegradable materials where possible. The Market has banned single use plastic carrier bags from being used (wherever possible), instead traders offer alternative packaging options and customers are encouraged to bring their own bags.
- 4.5 The Market has made good progress and now has a recycling rate of about 70%. It is working with local groups on reducing waste as well as working with Devon Recycling to promote local recycling and composting schemes to the general public.

## 5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 The Council has made progress in phasing out the use of SUPs on Council premises, and is actively working with suppliers to take action where appropriate. It is recommended that the Environment PDG continues to monitor actions taken by the Council on SUPs, perhaps in an update to the Group in twelve months' time.

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and Commercial Assets; Group Manager for Building Services (input/comments sought from all).

**List of Background Papers:** Procurement letter and previous report dated March 2019.