

Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	18 July 2019	
Report Title:	Single Use Plastics Audit	

1 Purpose / Summary

To report to Cabinet on the audit of the disposal of single use plastics in line with Items 1 and 2 of Motion 1, 'Single Use Plastics', agreed by Council on 23 May 2019.

2 Key issues

- 2.1 Plastic is a durable, light, cheap and versatile material that has made huge technical innovations possible, making consumer products more affordable and efficient.
- 2.2 Single use plastics (SUP) can be defined as all products that are made wholly or partly of plastic and are typically intended to be used just once and/or for a short period of time before being disposed of. Some single use plastics can be very useful, such as medical plastics or by protecting food from damage.
- 2.3 The durability of plastic present challenges, and when littered, it can last for centuries in the natural environment. Plastic litter blights the countryside and waterways, is a threat to wildlife and is dominated by single use items containing plastic, such as cigarette butts and food and drink-related litter.
- 2.4 The Government published its 25 Year Environment Plan in 2018 which includes targets to reduce waste and to achieve zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042. The recently published waste strategy consultation has focussed on reducing waste and increasing the amount of recycling taking place, especially packaging and 'on the go' waste. The strategy includes a proposed deposit return scheme (DRS) for single use drinks packaging which from 2023 places a levy on products at the point of sale with the aim of reducing litter.
- 2.5 The first stage of the agreed actions within the Motion was for the Council to audit the disposal of single use plastics used by the Council. To this end a project team has been formed and an initial audit of the "disposal of single use plastics used by this Council" has been completed.
- 2.6 For Fenland District Council, all collected plastic waste through our own operations, domestic and business blue bin recycling collections are sorted at the Waterbeach Materials Recycling Facility by contractor Amey LG Ltd before it is sent to plants in the UK for further processing/reprocessing in to new products. Therefore, we have received assurance from our contractor that single use plastics the Council is disposing of should not be entering our seas or oceans.
- 2.7 A proportion of these plastics are being transformed into new packaging within Cambridgeshire itself through a new partnership with a local packaging manufacturer producing new materials from plastics customers put in their blue bin in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area.
- 2.8 In many cases there are opportunities to reduce the amount of single use plastics within Council buildings and facilities. The audit also identified opportunities to improve the

recycling choices available to colleagues and Councillors within Council buildings and activities.

- 2.9 However, it also must be recognised that a proportion of the materials identified, such as clinical containers and litter collection sacks are a necessary and appropriate use of single use plastics because there are currently limited viable alternatives and they are competently and responsibly disposed of. We will continue to try and source appropriate alternatives where possible.
- 2.10 A more detailed future report will provide Members with an update on the actions of the project team delivering this work in helping the Council to adhere to the 3R's principles - Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Note the content of the audit and work completed to date.
- 3.2 Note the assurance from the Council's contractor, Amey LG Ltd that the single use plastics the Council disposes of should not be entering our seas or oceans.
- 3.3 Note the delivery of a further update report this calendar year evaluating our success or otherwise in adhering to the 3Rs principles - Reduce, Reuse and Recycle and covering points 3, 4 & 5 of the Council motion.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Peter Murphy, Portfolio Holder for Environment (Operational) Councillor Steve Tierney, Portfolio Holder for Environment (Strategic)
Report Originator(s)	Mark Mathews, Head of Environmental Services mmathews@fenland.gov.uk Carol Pilson, Corporate Director cpilson@fenland.gov.uk
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Background Paper(s)	Council Motion 23 May 2019; Single Use Plastics

1 Background / introduction

- 1.1 Single-use plastics (SUP) can be defined as all products that are made wholly or partly of plastic and are typically intended to be used just once and/or for a short period of time before being disposed of.
- 1.2 Plastic is a remarkable material with enormous benefits. It is durable, light, cheap and versatile, and has made huge technical innovation possible. Plastic has made many consumer products more affordable, and has made it possible to reduce the weight of aeroplanes and vehicles, which reduces fuel use. Single-use plastics can also be very useful, for example in low-cost hygienic medical plastics. Plastic packaging can protect goods from damage and extend the shelf life of food. This can significantly reduce waste, including food waste ([HM Treasury](#)).
- 1.3 However, the durability of plastic also presents significant challenges. When littered, it can last centuries in the natural environment, where wildlife can become entangled in plastic or ingest small pieces of it. This damages delicate ecosystems, such as the Arctic, which is where the majority of UK marine plastic pollution ends up.
- 1.4 Plastic litter blights UK countryside and waterways, and is a major threat to wildlife as well as fish stocks in the English Channel. Litter in towns and cities are dominated by single-use items containing plastic such as cigarette butts and food and drink-related debris. In addition, plastics can eventually degrade into micro-plastics, which enter the food chain.
- 1.5 It is estimated (www.recyclenow.com) that in the UK 11,000 plastic bottles a minute are ending up in landfill or as litter, which has the potential to enter waterways and the sea.
- 1.6 Plastics can be a highly effective carrier of pollutants, giving them the ability to act as a vehicle for trace metals and other chemicals in the natural environment. This has the potential to further harm the wildlife consuming them, and might also affect water and soil conditions more than litter made up of inert materials.
- 1.7 In the 60 years since large-scale production of plastics began, it is reported that 79% of all the plastic waste globally has been disposed of in landfills or the natural environment ([Greenpeace/EIA](#)), with a total of 9% recycled. Currently in the UK recycling rates for consumer plastic packaging are 30-34%.

2 National and Local Government Action

- 2.1 The UK Government published its [25 Year Environment Plan](#) just over a year ago, which includes targets to reduce waste and increase recycling, such as to “achieve zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042”. Defra’s new [Waste and Resources Strategy](#) supports this ambition and recent consultation discussed a range of options to reduce waste and increase the amount of recycling taking place, especially packaging and ‘on the go’ style waste.
- 2.2 The Strategy looks to move away from an ineffective linear economy of “take, make, use, throw” to a circular waste economy which keeps resources in use as long as possible, gaining maximum use from them.
- 2.3 Enhanced Producer Responsibility within the Strategy, states that in future the costs of disposal and treatment of packaging waste will be paid for by the producer rather than be a burden for the local authority. This will see disposal and recycling leading the design of packaging materials, leading to an anticipated reduction in the amount of packaging overall.
- 2.4 The Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) proposed for all single use drinks packaging will place a levy on the product charged to the consumer only refunded by returning the

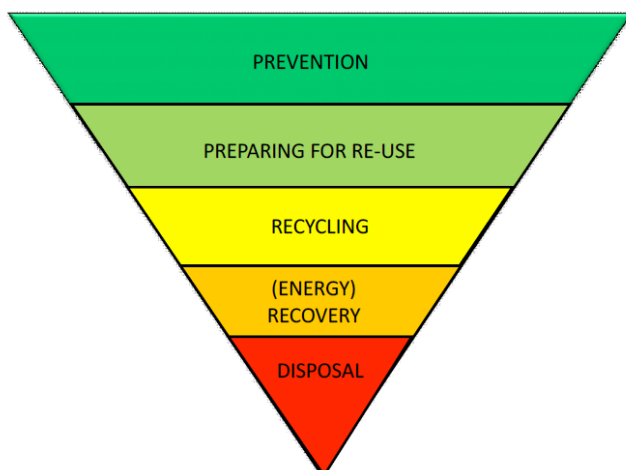
packaging to a defined collection point. When put in place this will increase the capture of this 'on the go' style waste most likely to become litter.

- 2.5 The Government has also recently declared an intention to ban plastic straws, drink stirrers and cotton buds in line with an EU directive to reduce the impact of plastics on the environment.
- 2.6 To promote the recycling industries in the UK, as part of the 2018 budget statement, the Government announced a new tax on produced and imported plastic packaging that does not include a least 30% recycled content. This commences in 2021.
- 2.7 The collection authorities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have a contract for the transport and onward sale of recycling collected from domestic and business premises with Amey LG at their Waterbeach Waste Management Park (www.waterbeachwastemanagementpark.co.uk.)
- 2.8 The company says, "Amey welcomes the range of recent helpful initiative in encouraging householders and businesses to reduce their waste, and reuse and recycle more of the waste they create. Plastic packaging sorted at Amey's Waterbeach Materials Recycling Facility is sent to plants in the UK for further processing/reprocessing into new products."
- 2.9 Further to this, Amey LG advise that, "The further processing is conducted in the UK and these are activities that are regulated and controlled by the UK's Environment Agency (EA) which has a robust and exhaustive permitting and monitoring regime. Amey LG are not aware of any breaches of permit by these operators that could lead to contamination of water streams and we follow a duty of care regime that is regularly audited by the EA. The possibility of a UK operator contaminating water streams without eventually being detected and prosecuted seems virtually impossible. We cannot speak for the regulator, but we do rely on the EA to carry out its duties to provide the assurance required."
- 2.10 Amey LG are working to innovate too and "plastic packaging from Cambridgeshire residents' blue bins is separated at their Waterbeach facility and transformed into new packaging manufactured within the county thanks to an innovative partnership with local councils and Huntingdon-based packaging manufacturer, Charpak."

3 Fenland District Council

- 3.1 In supporting the recent Single Use Plastics Motion, the Council agreed that "the Council should in absolutely no way be responsible, either directly or indirectly, for plastic waste entering our seas and oceans", and should be applying the waste hierarchy (See image below) to plastic usage within the Council's activities – Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. The first stage of the agreed actions was for the Council to audit the disposal of single use plastics used by the Council. To this end a project team has been formed and an initial audit of the "the disposal of single use plastics used by this Council" has been completed.

Image 1 Waste Hierarchy



4 Audit

- 4.1 The table at appendix 2 provides information on the SUP identified within the initial audit and the opportunities to apply the waste hierarchy.
- 4.2 In many cases there are opportunities to reduce the amount of single use plastics within Council buildings and facilities, such as providing reusable water bottles rather than the existing plastic containers at drinks fountains, replacing plastic stirrers with other materials and providing cups for meetings.
- 4.3 The audit also identified opportunities for improvement with the recycling choices available to colleagues and councillors, which was recognised within the most recent staff survey.
- 4.4 All materials from recycling bins within FDC premises are sorted and sent for onward recycling as part of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough contract with Amey LG Ltd at Waterbeach. The contractor is bound within the contract and monitored by a contract compliance officer and the Environment Agency. As noted previously, we are informed that plastic packaging sorted at Amey's Waterbeach Materials Recycling Facility is sent to plants in the UK for further processing/reprocessing into new products and some of the plastic resource is used through a direct arrangement with a Huntingdon based plastics manufacturer.
- 4.5 A proportion of the materials identified within the audit, such as clinical waste containers and residual sacks provided to customers, are necessary and appropriate use of single use plastics because there are limited viable alternatives, however we will continue to review. The Council has worked to reduce the levels of customers using bags for their residual and other waste and encourages the use of wheeled bins wherever possible. Disposal routes for these materials are again provided through competent and legally compliant contractors through County Council contracts.
- 4.6 The County Council is responsible through their PFI contractor for the disposal of all residual domestic and commercial waste collected within Fenland.

Appendix 1: Council Motion

- 1.1 Council recognises that many Fenland residents have very real concerns about the use of Single Use Plastics (SUPs), especially following David Attenborough's recent television series about our seas and oceans.
- 1.2 Anecdotal evidence suggests somewhere in the region of eight million tonnes of plastic waste enters the sea each year. David Attenborough urged: "a plastic crisis is engulfing our seas and we need to stop the problem urgently".
- 1.3 It was agreed that the Council should in absolutely no way be responsible, either directly or indirectly, for plastic waste entering our seas and oceans.

2 THE COUNCIL RESOLVED

- 2.1 that an audit of the disposal of single use plastics used by this Council be conducted and presented to the July meeting of Cabinet to give assurance (or otherwise) that no plastic waste produced by FDC is entering our seas or oceans.
- 2.2 that if any evidence is found that single use plastic waste produced by FDC is entering our seas or oceans, immediate action be taken by Officers to change our disposal methods to stop any of FDC's plastic waste entering our seas or oceans.

The disposal and use of SUPs is but a part of a much wider problem. FDC should be adhering to the "REDUCE, RE-USE and RECYCLE" principles (often called the "3Rs") when considering all of its activities.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED

- 2.3 that a comprehensive report be prepared and considered by Cabinet this calendar year evaluating our success or otherwise in adhering to the 3Rs principles in all of FDC's activities, proposing improvements to current practice wherever possible. In that context, specific consideration should be given to how the direct use of any SUPs by FDC can be consistent with FDC's adherence to the 3Rs.
- 2.4 that the comprehensive report in item 3 above should consider how FDC can, via its procurement of goods, services and supplies, wherever feasible and appropriate minimise if not eliminate its indirect use of SUPs via its procurement of goods, services and supplies.
- 2.5 that, once FDC is able to display a high level of compliance with the 3Rs principles, we should seek to lead by example and influence the behaviour of the District's other institutions, businesses, tenants and citizens.

Appendix 2: Single Use Plastics Audit

SUP Item	Used by	Typical disposal route	Reduce/Reuse/Recycle Action	Option for alternative
Drink cups - water	Visitors, staff and councillors	Residual Bin	REDUCE and RECYCLE	Can be replaced with alternatives or recycled
Plastic Spoons	Visitors, staff and councillors	Residual Bin	REDUCE	Can be replaced with alternatives
Coffee Sticks	Visitors, staff and councillors	Residual Bin	REDUCE	Provide coffee urns
Biscuit Wrappers	Conference users	Residual Bin	REDUCE	Recycle bin in conference rooms or loose biscuits
Business Centre Milk	Tenants and visitors	Residual Bin	RECYCLE	Encourage use of Recycling bins
Orange juice cartons	Conference users	Residual Bin	RECYCLE	Encourage use of Recycling bins
Bin Liners	Staff and Tenants	Residual Bin	REDUCE	Reduce number of bins used
Vending Drinks Cups	Various locations	Residual Bin	RECYCLE	Encourage use of Recycling bins
Vending machine bottles and cans	Staff, tenants and visitors	Recycling Bin	RECYCLE	Encourage use of Recycling bins
Vending machine stock	Staff, visitors and tenants	Residual Bin	REDUCE	Consider alternatives
Franking machine label backing	Staff	Residual Bin	RECYCLE	Encourage use of Recycling bins
Cash Bags	Staff	Contractor	REDUCE	Minimal use
Copier Paper Reams	Staff	Residual Bin	REDUCE	Investigate alternatives
Post Bag Blue security discs	post room	Residual bin	REDUCE	Investigate alternatives

SUP Item	Used by	Typical disposal route	Reduce/Reuse/Recycle Action	Option for alternative
Packaging Materials via deliveries	post room	Residual bin	REDUCE	Investigate alternatives
Black Waste Sacks	Customers and staff	Residual bins	MANAGE	Encourage use of recycling bins
Orange Cleansing Sacks	Cleansing staff	Residual bin	MANAGE	Encourage use of recycling bins
Clear Recycling Sacks	Customers and staff	Recycling bin	RECYCLE	Encourage use of recycling bins
Blue Commercial Waste Sacks	Trade Waste	Residual bin	MANAGE	Encourage use of recycling bins
Clinical Waste Containers	Customers	Specialist contractor	MANAGE	Designated collection points
Evidence and sample bags	Enforcement officers	Law enforcement	MANAGE	Limited use