

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny

Date of Meeting: 7th February 2019

Report Title: Overview and Scrutiny Review of Single Use Plastics

Report By: Chantal Lass, Sustainability Manager, Democratic Services

Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on the work that has been carried out by Overview and Scrutiny to review the Councils work to date on phasing out the use of single use plastics (SUP) and to make recommendations for further action by the Council.

Recommendation(s)

1. To review the Councils sustainable procurement policy and actions to support reducing our purchase of SUP products.
2. Local events – explore how to reduce the use of plastic cutlery, food containers and cups for drinks e.g. re-usable stackable cups, at large scale events in the town. Investigate other local authorities sustainable events guide e.g. Brighton.
3. Carryout an audit of single use plastics in the Councils operational buildings identifying which items are our own purchases or part of our contractors services e.g. office cleaning and create a single use plastics policy for the Council.
4. The Business Improvement District – could initiatives be developed with the town centre BID to reduce the use of plastics in local businesses e.g. take away food containers such as polystyrene boxes & plastic straws.
5. Discussions were held around the viability of phasing out other single-use plastic inside Council offices, to meet the 2019 commitment as part of the motion to Council. Further analysis and consideration of alternative options should be undertaken, by consulting with services across the council to clearly identify where SUPS use is most significant, and how this might be achieved.
6. To review the Councils environmental Policy to make sure it addresses current environmental pollution issues such as the use of SUPs.
7. Find out what local businesses are doing and could do to support a plastics free Hastings and explore the potential to create a ‘green rating’ for local businesses like ‘scores on the doors.’
8. To create a sustainable event guidance note for local events which provides advice on eliminating single use plastics at events.
9. To find out more information about Newport Waste Savers Trust and how it is operated to see if there is anything that can be replicated in Hastings?

10. To promote the local refill project.
11. For Councillors to research about the 'Plastics Pact' promoted by WRAP.
12. Can the Council promote and expand the water fountains available in town? Can these be highlighted on a tourist map?
13. Community beach cleans and neighbourhood litter picks – how else can the Council support these events?
14. To organise a visit to the Newhaven Waste to Energy facility for councillors.

Reasons for Recommendations

As part of the review, the team explored the background to the issue of plastics pollution including where plastics waste in our oceans come from; understanding what happens to the plastic waste we collect in the borough; our actions to reduce single use plastics in our offices; and grassroots community action.

The review team have developed a set of recommendations for further research and activity for consideration by the Council, which they consider will help to reduce the Council's use of single use plastics and more broadly reduce the Council's environmental impact.

Introduction

1. In April 2018, a motion to Council was passed by Full Council. The motion presented called for phasing out the use of Single Use Plastics (SUP's) within all Council buildings and services, with the aim of achieving zero use by the end of 2019.
2. Single Use Plastics can include any disposable plastic item which is designed to be used only once and includes plastic bags, stationery, plastic cutlery, drinking containers, coffee capsules, wet wipes, razor blades, plastic drinks bottles, hand sanitiser bottles, food wrappers, bottle tops, straws, air fresheners, and plastic stirrers.

Review Team

3. The review team members are Councillors Maya Evans (Chair), Ruby Cox, Paul Foster and Tania Charman
4. Officer support was provided by Chantal Lass, Coral Harding and Deniz Musa.
5. The review has also benefitted from advice from other services including Cameron Morley and the waste, street scene and cleansing services.

Methods

6. Desktop research and guidance on policy and processes from Council officers working in this field and the varying experiences shared by Councillors on the review team served as the basis from which Councillors arrived at the recommendations set out.

Background Information

7. Plastics are made from oil a finite resource, (and a source of both climate emissions and pollution). They can be moulded into a diverse range of complex shapes and forms, and can be changed to meet an endless variety of needs. There are at least seven different types of plastic polymers (see appendix 1) that are widely used for packaging (bottles, food), building materials (pipes, window frames), and to make fibres (clothing, carpets). Cars and planes are about 50% by volume, and more clothes are made out of plastic (polyester and nylon) than cotton and wool. Our mobile phones and associated chargers, IT equipment, TV's and many other everyday items are made from plastic. Plastics can be recycled into many different 'new' products including clothing, toys, buckets, building materials, composters and plastic packaging.
8. 4.2 In the UK, we use huge amounts of plastic packaging to transport and package a range of vast number of products including food, drinks, cleaning products, shampoos and toiletries. Plastic is light, pliable, flexible, strong and an easy to transport material.
9. 4.3 However, despite its versatility, there is now growing acceptance, locally, nationally and globally of the negative impact plastic waste is having on our environment and in particular the marine environment. It is estimated that over 8 million tonnes of plastics are making our way into our oceans every year, posing a threat to our natural and marine environment. Around 80% of the plastic in the ocean is suspected to come from activities and industry on land. A product that was once lauded as a 'stroke of genius' has become one of the fastest growing environmental problems in the world, posing a threat for wildlife and humans.

Where does the plastic waste in our oceans come from?

10. A recent study has shown that most of the plastics found in our oceans is washed into rivers, with 90% of it coming from 10 key river systems; 8 of which are located in Asia and 2 in Africa. Two key factors contributed to this; a generally high population living in the surrounding region and a less than ideal waste management process in place in individual countries. However, much of this waste does not originate from the country bordering a river, but is waste imported from other parts of the world, looking to transfer their waste disposal and recycling responsibilities. The UK has been sending its plastic waste to China and more recently Malaysia and Vietnam.

The Yangtze is Asia's longest river and one of world's most ecologically important rivers. The river basin is home to almost 500 million people (more than one third of China's population). It is also the biggest carrier of plastic pollution to the ocean. (Source World economic Forum)

In January 2018, China announced that it was stopping importations of waste from other parts of the world and has begun to establish management practices for its countries own waste. This has had a huge impact on the Uk's waste management practices.

11. Most common plastics are not biodegradable, or able to be broken down by bacteria or living organisms. The estimated time it takes for plastics to decompose varies depending on the type of plastic and its function – plastics can photodegrade (from sunlight if designed to do so) or degrade into smaller and smaller pieces. A water bottle (PET) takes over 450 years; a plastic shopping bag (HDPE) between 10 & 100 years; A detergent bottle (HDPE) over 500 years; a drinking straw (PP) over 100 years; a yoghurt pot (PP) over 100 years and a polystyrene cup (XPS) between 50 & 500 years. Large pieces of plastic are turned into micro plastics, as they are slowly broken into smaller parts as the plastics age, becoming brittle and break up. The largest accumulation of plastics in the world is located between Hawaii and California the 'Great Pacific Garbage Patch' covering an estimated surface area of 1.6 million kilometres, containing an estimated 80,000 tonnes of plastic. .

Responses to Plastic Pollution

12. Businesses, local authorities, communities and individuals across the UK and beyond are using their efforts to respond to the plastic pollution problem by adopting policies and practices, sharing knowledge and information to reduce our reliance and dependency on plastics and where sure maximise the opportunity to recycle and reuse them

13. Momentum is gathering pace to find solutions to our plastic and other waste problems including shifting to a 'circular economy' which is based on 3 principles:

- Design out waste and pollution
- Keep products and materials in use
- Regenerate natural systems

Such an approach provides an opportunity to rethink and reshape the future of plastic so that we can retain its value, and curtail the damage plastic creates on our planet, by transforming the plastics system. UK Businesses have recently called for the Government to address the UKs waste management infrastructure, especially as options for recycling/ disposal as international markets diminish.

14. On the 18th December 2018, the Government published its 'Resources and Waste Strategy' which includes a commitment to developing a more circular economy, whereby resources are recycled and recovered and made into new products; the strategy includes plans to introduce a tax on plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled plastic content and commitments to international action on plastics. It sets out a vision for the revaluing of our limited resources and to introduce a deposit return system for cans and plastic.

15. International commitments include the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance (CCOA) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals including SDG 14 to 'conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development'. The CCOA aims to end the use of single use plastic and address marine plastic pollution, and promote progress towards SDG 14

Understanding what happens to our plastic waste in the Borough

16. The Council is only responsible for collecting household waste and we have been collecting 'household' plastic waste for recycling since the 1990's; the plastic materials that can be recycled have been gradually expanded over the years as recycling markets have developed and grown.
17. Plastic products can be recycled at the recycling centres throughout the town, the waste and recycling site at Pebsham, or through the household kerbside recycling scheme. The Council is only responsible for collecting household waste, East Sussex County Council are responsible for its 'disposal' including working with the waste contractors to secure markets for all the materials we collect.
18. Materials collected from the recycling centres and the kerbside recycling scheme is collected by Kier and transported to the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) at Crayford, in Kent. The mixed recycling is processed and sorted into the different materials, baled and sent for reprocessing in the UK, and/or abroad depending on the material, the market value of the material, and the markets need for the material at the time of collection.
19. In the case of single use plastics, these can be sent for processing where they are made into new products including fleeces, garden furniture and plastic packaging.

Single Use Plastics at the Council

20. In response to the motion to Council in April, the Council has slowly begun to reduce its dependency on single use plastic products, especially where it has direct control over their use in our office buildings.
21. For example, the use of single use plastic cups in meetings has been phased out – staff and Councillors are encouraged to use their own cup and glass for hot and cold drinks. For meetings involving external partners, china mugs and glasses are now provided; tea, coffee and sugar is now provided in large glass jars, eliminating the need to use sachets of tea coffee and sugar which are often made from plastic.
22. Staff and councillors bring shop bought and homemade food and drink to work to sustain them throughout the day. In all of the staff and communal kitchen areas, recycling facilities are provided for recycling our waste including single use plastic items, e.g. drinks bottles (milk and fizzy drinks) and yoghurt pots to enable these to be collected and recycled. A number of years ago, we removed individual desk bins to help reduce our waste and encourage staff to think about the waste they generated whilst at work.
23. Areas in our offices where single use plastics are still being bought and used include kitchen and office cleaning products, air fresheners, stationery products (pens, cello tape, paper clips).

Grass Roots Community Action and Engagement

24. A number of community groups are carrying out both beach and neighbourhood 'clean up' days including the local action groups of Surfers Against Sewage, the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), and 'Tidy up St Leonards'. Regular community events are held e.g. monthly beach cleans with MCS. These are

supported by our resort services who provide litter pickers and plastic bags and arrange for collection of the waste once the event is over. Surfers against Sewage have also set up a social media page 'Plastics Free Hastings' as part of a national campaign 'Plastic free Communities'.

25. Hastings Transition Town has worked with a national grassroots movement 'Refill', an initiative to prevent plastic pollution at source by making it easier to reuse and refill a water bottle instead of buying a new one. The UK has some of the best quality, free drinking water in the world. Refill has estimated that the average person in the UK will use 150 plastic water bottles every year. If just 10% of us refilled once a week, we would have saved 340 million plastic bottles in a year. Transition Town Hastings has to date encouraged over 25 local businesses to pledge to the scheme, and will continue to encourage local businesses to sign up. Local Businesses supporting the local scheme can be found on the Refill App or on the Refill Hastings Facebook page.

Recommendations for further action

26. A number of recommendations for further research and / or action have been suggested by the review team to further the Council's commitment to phasing out Single Use Plastics in its buildings and services, and the wider Hastings community and are listed below. These were each carefully considered by the review team and rated accordingly in priority order as follows:
1. To review the Council's sustainable procurement policy and actions to support reducing our purchase of SUP products
 2. Local events – explore how to reduce the use of plastic cutlery, food containers and cups for drinks e.g. re-usable stackable cups, at large scale events in the town. Investigate other local authorities sustainable events guide e.g. Brighton
 3. Carry out an audit of single use plastics in the Council's operational buildings identifying which items are our own purchases or part of our contractors services e.g. office cleaning and create a single use plastics policy for the Council.
 4. The Business Improvement District – could initiatives be developed with the town centre BID to reduce the use of plastics in local businesses e.g. take away food containers such as polystyrene boxes & plastic straws
 5. Discussions were held around the viability of phasing out other single-use plastic inside Council offices, to meet the 2019 commitment as part of the motion to Council. Further analysis and consideration of alternative options should be undertaken, by consulting with services across the council to clearly identify where SUPS use is most significant, and how this might be achieved.
 6. To review the Council's environmental Policy to make sure it addresses current environmental pollution issues such as the use of SUPs.
 7. Find out what local businesses are doing and could do to support a plastics free Hastings and explore the potential to create a 'green rating' for local businesses like 'scores on the doors'
 8. To create a sustainable event guidance note for local events which provides advice about eliminating single use plastics at events

9. To find out more information about Newport Waste Savers Trust and how it is operated to see if there is anything that can be replicated in Hastings
10. To promote the local refill project
11. For Councillors to research about the 'Plastics Pact' promoted by WRAP.
12. Can the Council promote and expand the water fountains available in town? Can these be highlighted on a tourist map?
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14. To organise a visit to the Newhaven Waste to Energy facility

Summary and Conclusion

27. Whilst reducing the use of Single Use Plastics is a part of the solution to the global plastics pollution problem, reducing our dependency and finding alternative packaging solutions and/or reducing our consumption of such products will take time both locally, nationally and internationally.
28. However, we saw a total ban on the manufacture and sale of microbeads (microbeads are tiny pieces of plastic added to everyday items such as toothpaste, facial wash and abrasive cleaners) in 2016, in response to their widespread pollution of the marine environment and growing banning of single use plastic bags, so global and national action is possible.
29. However, to be able to totally phase out the use of Single use Plastics (SUPs) from across the Council is a significant and ongoing piece of work. The review team recognise that it will take time to fully capture all SUPs that are in our buildings and across our services. In some circumstances it may not be possible to find a suitable alternative at this current time.
30. However, the work that is being undertaken nationally to develop a 'circular economy' approach to plastics and other resources will in the long term see a change in how plastics are viewed, used and reused.
31. The recommendations developed by the review team, can be seen in context of other projects the Council is developing. These include income generation plans for renewable energy, an emerging Energy Strategy for the town and its response to the IPCC climate change report calling for action to limit global temperature to 1.5°C, and the launch of our in-house street cleaning service and partnership with the new household waste contractor.
32. These recommendations support the Council's sustainability ambitions to address climate change and the use of natural resources. The review team felt that it will be important for Overview and Scrutiny to retain at least a watching brief to keep abreast of emerging policy developments, support the Council's sustainability ambitions and help monitor our progress.

Wards Affected

All

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)
Risk Management
Environmental Issues – yes
Economic/Financial Implications
Human Rights Act
Organisational Consequences - yes
Local People's Views
Anti-Poverty

Additional Information

The UK Plastics Pact <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/the-uk-plastics-pact>

Refill UK <https://refill.org.uk/about/>

Plastic Oceans UK <http://plasticoceans.uk/the-facts/>

Ellen MacArthur Foundation –the circular economy
<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy/concept>

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