

Agenda Item	16
Report No	HC/24/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: The Highland Council

Date: 28 June 2018

Report Title: Single Use Plastics

Report By: Director of Development and Infrastructure

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an overview of the Council's current arrangements regarding single-use plastics (SUP) and provides recommendations in respect of further reducing single use plastic use throughout the organisation.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- note the contents of the report;
- agree that a strategy should be developed to ensure that the Council works towards phasing out SUP from its sites and schools in an effort to exceed statutory requirements;
- agree that work with community planning partners should be undertaken to encourage the uptake of mutually-reinforcing strategies to reduce plastic pollution in a catering sundries context;
- agree that Commercial and Procurement Shared Services (C&PSS), Scotland Excel and Catering Managers should work together to incrementally phase out SUP in the procurement of catering sundries and consider introducing wider measures designed to reduce the plastic content of packaging;
- agree that communications are prepared and disseminated to inform Highland communities about the reasons the Council is phasing out SUP, and encourage them to switch to alternatives;
- agree that a cross-party Highland Council working group is created to provide input and recommendations for the overarching strategy and the phasing out of SUP, with Cllr Trish Robertson as Chair; and
- agree that a cross-service Highland Council Officers' group is created to implement the recommendations and write the overall strategy.

3. Background

- 3.1 The majority of plastic currently produced can be recycled. However, the extent to which plastics are recycled depends upon various technical, economic and logistical factors. As a valuable and finite resource, given that it is derived from fossil fuels such as oil and coal, the optimum recovery route for most plastic items at the 'end-of-life' is to be recycled, preferably back into a product that can then be recycled again and again, ad infinitum.
- 3.2 It is estimated that 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic has been produced globally to date, with 6.3bn tonnes of this becoming plastic waste. Only 9% of plastic is recycled, 12% is incinerated, resulting in 79% of the plastic produced to date either ending up in landfill or the natural environment. Single Use Plastics (SUP) make up a significant proportion of this total. For the purpose of this report, SUP can include any disposable plastic item which is designed to be used only once.
- 3.3 The Highland Council recognises that discarded plastics, including non-recyclable cups, bottles and straws, are a major environmental pollutant and of detrimental impact to the Highland region and its communities. There is an increasingly important need to be aware of the damage that plastic pollution, and in particular, SUP, has on our environment and public health. Studies show that SUP can take up to 600 years to degrade, breaking into fragments that cause damage to the environment and permeate the food chain, especially in our seas and oceans. This Council therefore recognises that, as the local authority having the longest coastline in Scotland (at 4,905 kilometres), Highland has a key role to play in reducing plastic waste.
- 3.4 SUP has a global impact and recent media coverage has moved SUP into prominence. These include the recent BBC series Blue Planet II, which highlighted the scale of plastic pollution in our seas and oceans. Other images and articles regarding, for example, giant SUP floating islands in our oceans, and wildlife deaths resulting from SUP, are also increasingly being reported by the media. Awareness of the significant environmental damage being caused by SUP has been raised in the public consciousness, and there is widespread momentum and support to reduce our dependency on these items.
- 3.5 The Highland Council is also supportive of initiatives led by local communities, such as the ban of plastic straws by the village of Ullapool. Pupils from Ullapool Primary campaigned successfully for all 14 cafes, bars and restaurants in Ullapool to be officially free of plastic straws from December 2017. The local supermarket plans to follow suit during 2018.
- 3.6 The Scottish Government is currently examining how best to reduce the use of SUP whilst increasing recycling rates. In the meantime, microbeads have been banned across Scotland, whilst plastic bag usage has declined by 80% since the introduction of the 5p per bag charge.
- 3.7 This paper provides Members with an update on current progress in tackling SUP at the Highland Council, and highlights future plans surrounding the use and supply of SUP within organisation.

4 Current Progress and Initiatives

- 4.1 Within Scotland and the UK, there is now widespread understanding and acceptance that SUP has a detrimental impact on our wider environment. To this end, Scotland has committed to legislating a ban on plastic cotton buds, and to introduce a deposit return

scheme for plastic bottles. However, the time frame for delivering these initiatives has not yet been confirmed. The [Deposit Return Scheme](#) which is being considered is designed to reduce the volume of single use drinks containers which end up as plastic litter.

- 4.2 It is important to note that the main use of SUP within the Council estate is through catering sundries. Addressing SUP in this sector provides the biggest opportunity to make a meaningful contribution in respect of the Council's efforts to reduce SUP.
- 4.3 Within Council Headquarters, the removal of SUP cups from water dispensers occurred a few years ago, and the coffee machine with polystyrene cups has also been removed from the Chamber area. Alternatives are being explored in respect of replacing SUP within the HQ canteen, and both staff and Members are being encouraged to bring their own reusable cups / bottles for drinks, cutlery, plates and tubs (or to use existing crockery within office kitchens), in order to minimise plastic waste. The Council is reviewing the option to sell reusable drinking bottles/mugs for use with cold and hot drinks for staff.
- 4.4 A key initiative to tackle SUP waste within the Council's estate is being undertaken as a pilot in Lochaber High School, where the catering team have purchased biodegradable Vegware products for take away meal options to replace polystyrene alternatives. Pupils have been charged 5p per take away carton. Whilst there is a cost difference per carton which equates to an additional £600 per year budget pressure, this has been deemed manageable and has been met by the Catering budget to date. Whilst Lochaber High continues to offer the takeaway Vegware cartons, there is opportunity to rollout changes like this to other schools. Costs would, however, need to be carefully reviewed as it is unlikely to be viable for the Catering Service budget to cover additional costs for all 29 secondary schools. It is likely that the charge per carton would need to increase if rolled out to all secondary schools to reduce the budget pressure. Potentially biodegradable cutlery and cups could also be introduced, although this would incur additional budget pressures. Implementing these changes very much depends on individual school circumstances and appetite to reduce plastic pollution on a site-by-site basis. In addition, agreement between with CCFM, Care and Learning, Secondary School Head Teachers and Pupil Councils would also be required.
- 4.5 In addition, consideration should be given regarding what happens to these or similar products if they are replacing plastic. Vegware is a compostable product, but takes considerable time to degrade. Therefore, the use of Vegware is only suitable if the Vegware items are collected separately and then composted, either on site in appropriate compost bins or taken to a centralised facility. In comparison, if plastic is recycled, it can continue to be reused indefinitely.
- 4.6 Another initiative, led by a sixth year pupil at Glen Urquhart High School, has removed the use of plastic bottles on site. The pupil secured a grant to buy all 200 pupils reusable drinks bottles. It is hoped that this model can be replicated throughout schools in the Highlands and possibly throughout wider Scotland. The grant was provided by Aird and Loch Ness Ward discretionary funding, chosen through our participatory budgeting approach there titled '*Your Cash, Your Choice*'.
- 4.7 Whilst the situation in respect of plastic straws is complex, it is currently being examined by Catering and Procurement staff through engagement with current suppliers. One of the key issues at present relates to drinks cartons which have plastic straws attached, which are popular and a good source of income for many schools. However, communications to pupils regarding the correct disposal process i.e. pushing straws

inside the cartons and disposing of it into appropriate recycling bins, may be a workable interim solution until manufacturers implement alternatives.

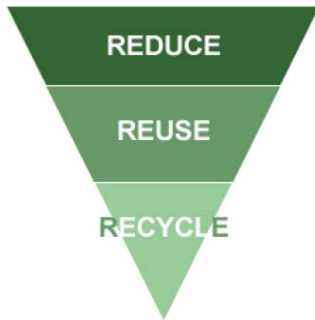
- 4.8 Due to the topical nature of SUP many local authorities are looking to reduce their use of SUP, as well as increase recycling rates and minimise plastic waste into our waterways and seas. For example, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has recently pledged to go straw-free within their civic catering and schools. Fife Council is considering a trial to use SUP as a bitumen-substitute to fill potholes. If successful, then this could be an option for other Scottish authorities.
- 4.9 At Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee (EDI) on 17 May 2018, it was agreed that the The Highland Council should once again support KIMO International (Kommunenenes Internasjonale Miljøorganisasjon), whose primary aim is to eliminate pollution from the Northern Seas. The three Councillors who will represent The Highland Council through KIMO are:
- Cllr Derek Macleod
 - Cllr Kirsteen Currie
 - Cllr Trish Robertson
- 4.10 There are currently more than 70 member authorities participating in KIMO International, from across the UK, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Lithuania and the Faeroe Islands. National networks also exist in each country, specifically, across Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, Argyll and Bute, Comhairlie nan Eilean Siar, Orkney and Shetland Islands Councils are all members working together to reduce and minimise marine litter.
- 4.11 Some of the initiatives KIMO UK is currently involved in are as follows:
- member of Scottish Marine Litter Strategy, influencing Scottish Marine Litter strategy and its implementation;
 - Fishing for Litter (FFL), encouraging fishermen to land litter caught in nets, at no cost to the fishermen. From 2014 -2017 FFL collected 337.3 tonnes of litter, 50% of which came from Highland harbours (Ullapool, Scrabster, and Kinlochbervie);
 - undertake education and awareness events e.g. 'Pick up 3 pieces' – encouraging beach visitors to take away 3 pieces of litter at each visit plus a range of other activities - talks, schools visits and beach cleans; and
 - net recycling – pilot project explored recycling of end of life fishing nets into plastic pellets.

5 Waste Strategy

- 5.1 Currently, there is no overarching waste strategy which identifies the phasing out of SUP as a priority. There are, however, three internal strategies covering paper, disposable cups and waste minimisation (see **Appendix 1**). The Waste Team are committed to working with the Climate Change Team to ensure that appropriate actions and initiatives are identified for inclusion in the revised Carbon Management Plan, which is currently being drafted.

- 5.2 The Highland Council's waste hierarchy identifies three waste disposal options and ranks them in order of importance. The 3Rs of reduce, reuse and recycle, classify waste management strategies according to their desirability.

Figure 1: Waste hierarchy



- 5.3 As agreed at EDI Committee on 17 May 2018, a new centralised waste management facility (Materials Recovery Facility) will be constructed in Highland. This facility will primarily process residual (non-recyclable) waste from 2021 but will also recover appropriate recyclate to increase the percentage of recyclables in the Highlands.
- 5.4 It is anticipated that the amount of recyclates will be relatively small. Scrap metals and some plastics from residual waste will likely amount to a few thousand tonnes. It would therefore be prudent to minimise or recycle waste at source through improved collections and behaviour change, rather than to recover from residual waste.

6 Carbon Management Plan

- 6.1 The Climate Change Team is currently redrafting the existing Carbon Management Plan (CMP), which will be presented to Members for approval later this year. The new plan will better reflect the Scottish Government's increased ambition in respect of tackling climate change, whilst a dedicated section on waste and waste management will supplement and support the existing waste strategy. As detailed above, there is currently no specific policy which addresses the reduction of SUP, but this could be incorporated into the new CMP.

7 Eco Officers

- 7.1 Early in 2018, The Highland Council recruited a team of volunteer Eco Officers to help support and implement low carbon behaviour change initiatives throughout the estate. The ambition is to have an Eco Officer based at all Council offices and locations throughout the area. A new campaign is undertaken by the Eco Officer network every quarter. The first campaign, which ran throughout February, March and April 2018, was titled 'Too Good to Waste' and aimed to improve how we deal with waste internally within the Council. Eco Officers were tasked with educating our staff to not only about how to reduce and manage our waste, but also to ensure that staff disposed of waste in the correct bins, thus decreasing the risk of contamination and enhancing the opportunity to recycle plastics and other disposable materials. The Eco Officers will continue to work with teams and colleagues to ensure progress is maintained and accelerated.
- 7.2 An annual waste campaign for the Eco Officers is planned, which opens up opportunities to implement removal of specific items of SUP in the estate in the future. Going forward, the Eco Officer network will play a vital role in promoting increased recycling of plastics throughout the estate.

7.3 Support from Senior Management, managers and Members is key to the success of the Eco Officer network and campaigns. Changing behaviour to more sustainable, carbon friendly norms requires a combined effort to ensure that staff understand the reasons why changes are being implemented throughout the estate, and to embed behaviours which will ultimately feed through to our homes and communities.

8 Procurement

8.1 The Highland Council adheres to the principles of Sustainable Procurement, and consideration is given to the impact the Council has on the local communities as well as the international community whenever we open an invitation to tender.

8.2 The Council makes extensive use of the Scotland Excel catering sundries framework, which is where the bulk of the SUP consumed by the Council originates. Any actions which arise as a result of the recommendations of this report will require partnership working with Scotland Excel and catering managers to introduce changes in purchasing behaviours as well as procurement. It is difficult to put a definitive timescale on this or give the impression that (without legislation) there can be a complete eradication of SUP. For example, there could be an outright ban in place as soon as next year if Parliament is so minded. However, at this early stage, it has been recognised that an outright ban could have adverse implications for individuals with special dietary needs, and could impact Scottish/UK manufacturers and some 3rd sector organisations involved in recycling initiatives. Giving the impression of inflexible “zero tolerance” on the issue could be seen as counter-productive.

8.3 However, the Council is actively working with our suppliers and national procurement team to identify alternatives to single use plastics; whilst some changes have already been implemented (see para 8.4 below), it is envisaged that further research and development is required in some areas before significant, meaningful changes can be made.

8.4 There are some good examples of where SUP has been phased out through the work of our Procurement Unit: one of the Council’s dairy suppliers has confirmed they will not be using or attaching straws to their own 200ml production, whilst another supplier has proposed a 3-step review, which includes the provision of appropriate labelling on our packaging to ensure straws are captured by the existing waste management infrastructure and recycled, rather than entering the wider environment; review and trial of current biodegradable and compostable straw options; and investigation of alternative packaging options.

9 Next Steps

9.1 As detailed above, there are a range of projects and initiatives currently underway throughout the Council’s estate to tackle and reduce the consumption of SUP. However, it is recognised that in order to maximise this reduction and ultimately phase out SUP, a strategy is required, as well as support from community planning partners and Highland communities to ensure that initiatives from across the region mutually reinforce each other. To this end, the recommendations contained within this report, if agreed, will enable the development of an overall strategy, whilst also recognising the important role that Procurement and Scotland Excel can play in driving this agenda. The draft strategy will be presented to November EDI Committee, after it has been reviewed by the EDI Policy Development Group.

10 Implications

- 10.1 Resource – Though there are alternatives available for most SUP, these are generally more expensive and may come with their own restrictions. These can include washing items to allow reuse, or ensuring the correct composting of biodegradable products. Costs could be offset by individuals paying a subsidy for these items. Behaviour change is key to support product or item changes to help inform and educate sustainable use. Time is also an important resource to consider, though most schools have Eco Committees, and the corporate Eco Officer Network can undertake most of the required awareness raising.
- 10.2 Legal - The Council has a legal duty to assist Scotland achieve its legislative targets in respect of climate change and waste. Whilst there is no current legislation surrounding SUP reduction, it is widely expected that this will be forthcoming. The Highland Council will comply with these targets and seek to be proactive to minimise challenging targets.
- 10.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – Potential equalities, poverty and rural implications are anticipated due to the increased cost of replacement long life products to remove SUP.
- 10.4 Climate Change/Carbon CLEVER - The plans to reduce SUP outlined in this report will reduce carbon emissions across the Highlands, due to reduced manufacturing, reuse, and increased recycling rates of plastics already in circulation.
- 10.5 Risk – Risk implications are considered on a project-specific basis as an integral part of the project assessment process. Climate change is now recognised as a Corporate Risk, and it is therefore important that efforts are made to reduce its impacts - the projects and initiatives detailed within this report will do so.
- 10.6 Gaelic – No implications arising from this report.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 24 May 2018

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The Council has three internal waste and recycling policies:

- Internal Paper Recycling Policy – now includes envelopes without the plastic windows
- Internal Policy on Disposable Cups
- Waste Minimisation Policy - which had a lot of useful information in it but requires updating.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/408/internal_waste_and_recycling