

Item: 15

General Meeting of the Council: 6 March 2018.

Single Use Plastics.

Joint Report by Executive Director of Corporate Services and Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider pledging the Council to cease the use of plastic straws in school and civic catering, and to consider longer term measures to reduce or eliminate single use plastics from Council operations.

2. Recommendations

The Council is invited to note:

2.1.

That Kate Forbes MSP, as part of the Final Straw campaign, has asked all Scottish councils to pledge to become plastic straw free, and stop the use of plastic straws in their catering outlets to protect the environment.

2.2.

That pupils from Glaitness School and St Andrews Primary School have written to their local councillors asking them to support the Final Straw campaign.

2.3.

That the Senior Management Team has established that it would be feasible for school and civic catering outlets to commit to become plastic straw free.

2.4.

That there would be resource implications to the further reduction in use of single-use non-recyclable plastics which are, at present, unquantified.

2.5.

The equality implications relating to use of plastic straws as, at present, there are no suitable alternatives for some people with disabilities.

2.6.

The work outlined in this report is contingent on the availability of staff resources which may be achievable through re-prioritisation of activity and utilising the remaining balance of £23,000 allocated from the Innovation Fund in respect of the Encourage Better Recycling project.

It is recommended:

2.7.

That the Council pledge to phase out use of plastic straws in schools and civic catering outlets.

2.8.

That plastic straws remain available where needed for people with disabilities in care settings and on request from other Council-run catering outlets.

2.9.

That, to assist with the Council's commitment in the draft Council Plan 2018 to 2023, a short life Member/Officer Working Group, comprising seven members, with a remit to appraise options for the further reduction in use of single-use non-recyclable plastics, be established.

2.10.

That the Council make appointments to the Member/Officer Working Group referred to above.

3. Policy Aspects

3.1.

The proposals in this report support the priority in the Council Plan 2013 to 2018 of:

- A Low Carbon Orkney— Renewables, Energy and Opportunity.

3.2.

The draft Council Plan 2018 to 2023, which was recommended for approval by the Policy and Resources Committee on 20 February 2018, includes the following priority:

- Eliminate single use/disposable plastic items within the Council where possible, and support others to do likewise.

3.2.1

The draft Plan further states: "Where there are cost-effective alternatives, we will eliminate single use/ disposable plastic items within the Council and support partners and the public to do likewise".

4. Background

4.1.

On 12 January 2018, Kate Forbes MSP, who is spearheading the Final Straw campaign, wrote to all of Scotland's 32 councils urging them to pledge not to use plastic straws, to help save the environment. The campaign website can be accessed at <https://www.finalstraw.scot/>. Elected members have since received letters on the subject from Glaitness School and St Andrews Primary School, and have held meetings with young ward members.

4.2.

On 16 January 2018, the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar pledged to phase out plastic straws for civic catering and in schools. A media release from the Comhairle can be accessed at <https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/news/2018/january/comhairle-nan-eilean-siar-pledge-to-go-plastic-straw-free/>.

4.3.

Elected members have requested an opportunity to consider an early response to the Final Straw campaign, in response to the wishes of their ward members.

5. Council activity to date on single-use plastics

5.1.

The challenge of eradicating plastic pollution is not new to the Council and considerable investment has been made to date in addressing this issue, including a temporary post of Waste Strategy Officer established as part of the Encourage Better Recycling project funded through the Innovation Fund. Through the Waste Strategy Officer, much has been done to raise awareness with commercial businesses and other establishments such as the Pickaquoy Centre. A schools audit took place last year, and the Waste Strategy Officer has also focused on general waste awareness raising in the community. Proposed next steps might include an audit of all Council property assets and functions, and the waste generated. There are community organisations which are working to address litter waste, and a partnership approach to further raise awareness in communities could be forged alongside actions to be taken internally by the Council.

5.2.

One of the agreed outcomes of the Council's current Sustainable Procurement Strategy is that 'negative environmental impacts are minimised and the environmental benefits maximised from our procurement'. The strategy further states that 'We will procure goods, services and works that minimise carbon-based energy use and its associated emissions, use of non-renewable resources, waste creation and pollution to air, water and land. In doing so, we will consider all stages of the life-cycle including design, resource extraction and sourcing, manufacturing and production, transportation, service delivery, operation and maintenance, reuse, recycling and disposal.'

5.3.

A revised draft Sustainable Procurement Strategy was considered by the Policy and Resources Committee on 20 February 2018. The strategy proposes a strengthened commitment to recyclates and plastics, and states: 'We will, where appropriate and where sustainable, specify goods and materials made with recycled material;' and 'We will not purchase goods and materials that are made of plastic which cannot be recycled where alternative goods and materials can be used.' Subject to approval of the new strategy, the Procurement service will amend the Council's Invitation to Tender documentation to specify corresponding requirements.

5.4.

Within the schools catering service, the use of straws is limited to secondary schools where they are sold pre-attached to juice cartons. The school meals service is unaware of any primary schools using straws, as drinks are dispensed in polycarbonate glasses which are then washed and re-used. A notice has been displayed to schools catering customers to explain that the issue of plastic straws and other single use plastics is being addressed and further information will be provided in due course. This has been copied to head teachers and to the Councillors who have been involved in meetings and correspondence with school pupils.

5.5.

With regard to other single-use plastics, the schools catering service uses disposable plates in the event of dishwasher breakdowns and for takeaway items; plastic spoons for drinks, yoghurts and takeaway items; polystyrene disposable cups for secondary school hot drinks; and disposable plastic cups for fruit salad and jelly. Most pupils have reusable bottles for the water dispenser, but plastic cups are available if needed. The schools catering service is currently looking at alternatives to single-use plastics, such as recyclable card or multiple use crockery, glasses and utensils. Additional resources would be required to cover purchase costs and staff time spent washing these items at the end of the meal service.

5.6.

Elsewhere within the Council, the Education, Leisure and Housing Service is currently looking at changing from plastic to paper straws in youth clubs, tuck shops, communal kitchens, the lounges in sheltered housing and Papdale Halls of Residence. Orkney College's cafeteria has recently taken steps to reduce waste by providing polycarbonate glasses instead of disposable glasses for water, and is also encouraging the use of mugs for tea and coffee rather than disposable cups.

5.7.

Orkney Health and Care is considering the scope to reduce the use of single-use plastics in care homes, care facilities, day centres, and children's services. There are, however, equality issues with regard to the use of plastic straws and some other plastics in care settings, and these are explored in the Equality Impact Assessment attached as Appendix 1 of this report.

5.8.

On 13 February 2018, the Council's Senior Management Team considered the issue of single-use plastics and agreed to ensure that their services committed to use of paper straws or alternative recyclable containers for drinks once existing stocks of plastic straws had been used. The Senior Management Team further committed that each service would consider ways in which single use of other non-recyclable plastics could be minimised within existing resources, and would consider ways in which such plastics could be further reduced. The Senior Management Team noted the limited staff resources currently available to support this work and asked that the Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure report back on these matters in due course.

6. Next Steps

6.1.

Services have confirmed that action has been taken regarding the use of plastic straws in school and civic catering. It would therefore be feasible for Members to pledge to phase out the use of plastic straws in these contexts.

6.2.

For the reasons given in the Equality Impact Assessment, plastics straws should continue to be available in care settings, and on request from other catering outlets when needed. This policy should be reviewed if a suitable alternative becomes available.

6.3.

The Senior Management Team has committed to consider ways in which the use of single-use non-recyclable plastics can be minimised within existing resources. Services would be able to reduce the use of such plastics further should resources be made available for this purpose. For example, there would be costs associated with the purchase of additional crockery, cutlery and glasses, and the staff time required to wash them. The resources required could be quantified with support from the Operational Environmental Services team. This work would be contingent on the availability of staff resources which may be achievable through re-prioritisation of activity and utilising the remaining balance of £23,000 allocated from the Innovation Fund in respect of the Encourage Better Recycling project.

6.4.

A short life Member/Officer Working Group is proposed, with a membership comprising seven Elected Members and officers as appropriate, to take this work forward. The working group would be supported by the Operational Environmental Services Team and resourced through the Innovation Fund. The information gathered would be collated and reported back to the Senior Management Team with a view to the preparation of a report to Policy and Resources Committee in due course.

7. Equalities Impact

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1.

The phasing out of plastic straws can be implemented at minimal cost. There may be resource implications to further reducing the Council's use of single-use non-recyclable plastics, given that the available alternatives currently cost more. The higher initial cost of purchase and any additional cleaning time before re-use can be weighed against repeat purchases and reduced waste streams. The resource implications are quantifiable using the existing resource available from the Innovation Fund.

8.2.

Any proposals requiring resource additional to that available from the Innovation Fund will be the subject of a future report to Policy and Resources Committee.

9. Legal Aspects

9.1.

In terms of the protected characteristics enshrined in the Equality Act 2010, the proposals in this report give rise to equality issues for people with disabilities, which are addressed in the Equality Impact Assessment.

9.2

This report proposes the establishment of a short life Member/Officer Working Group. A working group is not a committee or sub-committee of the Council and does not have delegated authority to make decisions.

10. Contact Officers

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11. Appendix

Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment.