

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Special Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Council Chamber - County Hall, Durham on **Monday 12 November 2018 at 9.30 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor E Adam (Chair)**

### **Members of the Committee:**

Councillors O Milburn, D Bell, S Dunn, D Hicks, P Howell, P Jopling, R Manchester, C Martin, A Patterson, A Simpson, P Sexton and M Wilson

### **Co-opted Members:**

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Holding

### **Also Present:**

Councillors J Clare and M Wilkes

### **1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Brown, J Carr, J Clark, R Crute and L Taylor.

### **2 Substitute Members**

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

### **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

### **4 Any Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

There were no item from Co-opted Members or Interested parties.

### **5 Single Use Plastics (SUPs):**

Members considered the cover report of the Head of Direct Services and Chair of the County Durham Environment Partnership together with a report of the County Durham Environment Partnership and an action plan that responded to a County Council resolution that called for a report to be produced on the phasing out of unnecessary single use

plastics across Council activities and assets as well as influencing partners and stakeholder to make similar commitments. A copy of the report of the Task Group, action plan, LARAC's response to a call for evidence from Government, a SUPs survey of Durham County Council (DCC) suppliers and survey results, detail of a range of plastic pledges and campaigns and Brighton and Hove's SUPs policy had been circulated with the papers for the meeting (for copy of reports, and supporting documents see file of minutes).

Mr Sherratt, The Head of Direct Services and the Chair of the County Durham Environment Partnership was in attendance to present the report and delivered a presentation (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The Chairman thanked Mr Sherratt for his very informative presentation and commented that the task group had undertaken a significant amount of work in a short space of time and that a lot of early wins had been identified.

Councillor Jopling referred to the practice of giving out SUP free gifts at promotional events and in particular made reference to the Area Action Partnerships.

Mr Sherratt responded that this type of comment was exactly the type of comment welcomed by the task group, highlighting areas of focus for a future SUPs audit. He continued that there was an argument for more useful products to be provided as free gifts that would last.

The Chairman commented that whilst in Blackpool he observed a huge amount of plastic free gifts being distributed and that more work needed to be done in this area.

Councillor Dunn indicated that a lot of work had been done in a short period of time by the task group. He asked how much of DCC plastic actually gets recycled or disposed of. He referred to the purchasing power and influence of DCC and commented that the authority can do a lot to eliminate unnecessary SUPs by looking at catering and events and ensures that it buys recyclable products.

He then referred to contracts and procurement and commented that DCC could include in future contracts provision for recyclable products and that this would influence a lot of bodies/organisations in the county by encouraging them not to use plastics. He asked if the introduction of an awards scheme and recognition logo had been considered. He asked Northumbrian Water if they had looked at producing their own brand of bottled water in recyclable bottles.

Mr Sherratt responded that the task group report gave details of how much plastic across the County was collected which was 7,713 tonnes and comprised of 6,872 tonnes kerbside and 886 tonnes from household waste recycling centres but there is potential for more to be recycled. Councillor Dunn asked for the proportion of recycling.

Mr Sherratt responded that 20/21% of residual plastic waste in bins could be recycled.

Mr Shannon, Strategic Waste Manager, indicated that 100% of kerbside collection goes for treatment and is recycled. However there is a variety of types of plastic at household waste recycling centres. He continued by commenting that, hard plastic is less easily recycled and would be chipped for use in road surfaces or as a fuel.

Mr Southall, Northumbrian Water commented that they would continue to promote the option of tap water which is of good quality and highlighted their continued support for the refill campaign.

The Chairman referred to the various reward schemes and that there was a need for DCC and partners to continue to offer reward schemes to both highlight and encourage the use of alternatives to SUPs. It was also important to provide an opportunity for residents to identify how SUPs usage can be reduced in the future.

Mr Sherratt referred to the 300 chargeable reusable plastic sip cups which DCC have sold and that discounts were also being offered on drinks to encourage the use of the alternative cups. He then referred to plastic cutlery which was bio degradable and that the procurement team had done a great deal of work in relation to current and future contracts.

Mr Shuttleworth, Procurement Manager commented on the importance of this meeting in publicising DCC's commitment to reducing the use of unnecessary SUPs and if the authority in the future commits to the pledge then contract specifications would be changed to remove these types of items where possible. He continued that a lot of work had already been done in relation to the catering and the use of alternatives to SUPs and that a visit with Durham University had recently taken place to a catering provider to discuss reducing the use of SUPs and that a further meeting with a vending provider is planned. He highlighted that further work is being undertaken with suppliers in relation to packaging. Councillor Howell indicated that he was delighted with the work undertaken and that he had recently attended an AAP event where they were giving out keyrings and sponge balls and that more needed to be done to make people aware of the use of unnecessary SUPs. He applauded the initiatives being undertaken by procurement in relation to contracts and asked if any work was being undertaken to stop plastic getting into the sewerage system.

Mr Sherratt indicated that the AAPs could sign up to the pledge.

Mr Southall, Northumbrian Water responded that plastic in the sewers did go through to treatment works and although they could capture larger plastics smaller plastics passed through the treatment process. They were currently working with Durham University on micro plastics but they had not come up with a solution at present, but work was in progress.

Councillor Wilkes thanked the Chairman and Officers for taking the issue so seriously and that he was surprised at how much progress had been made in a relatively short period of time. He indicated that more work needs to be done in relation to communication and that residents need to be made aware of why alternatives to SUPs are being used and gave the example of no longer using plastic shoe covers at Freemans Quay and plastic straws in DCC buildings. He continued that if DCC and partners continue to reduce the usage of unnecessary SUPs, the benefits will be seen by other local authorities and the message will go down the supply chain to suppliers that they cannot sell SUPs and that alternatives in the future will gradually become cheaper. He commended the work but would suggest they used publicity like County News to explain what the authority were doing in relation to alternatives to SUPs and promote the work being undertaken. He supported the local pledge and the wording.

Mr Sherratt indicated that they had done some communication on the early wins but agreed that more onsite communication was required. Progress had been made but there was still a lot to do.

Councillor Jopling sought clarification on hard plastics and if this was recycled in Durham or was it transported to other parts of the country for recycling.

Mr Shannon responded that there was a big range of plastic types some had a higher recyclable value than others and some were recycled in the UK others were worldwide. Hard plastics were less recyclable so the route used for this type of plastic was chipping with the chips used in roads or for fuel. If the correct processing facilities are available then hard plastic could be recycled.

Mr Sherratt referred to the highways trial scheme where they were using plastics on the road which was non-recyclable plastic which was sourced nationally but if the scheme was successful then they could look locally to put this into the roads.

Councillor Clare referred to non-recyclable waste not going to landfill and that it was sent to the SITA Plant to be burnt which resulted in emissions into the atmosphere causing pollution, so is there a difference in burning plastics. He then referred to Economics and asked if anyone had looked at the potential economic outfall of reducing the usage of unnecessary SUPs and whether any County Durham companies could be harmed by this approach. He continued that by adopting these good causes would it damage our own domestic industry. He appreciated that there was a strong message looking at prevention but does the policy propose any more measures to clear up beaches in the future.

The Chairman responded that economics was not always the driving factor, we needed to protect the planet.

Mr Sherratt responded that in relation to macro-economics that they rely on government research and that Government's 25 year environment plan contains a lot of detail including future proposals for further work to be undertaken with the packaging industry. He continued that DCC would look at micro-economics and that catering was mindful of the cost of moving from plastic to other alternative products which might cost more and prohibit change however this would be looked at and considered on a case by case basis. It was confirmed that to date cost had not prohibited change from SUPs products.

Mr Thompson, Catering Manager commented that it was not an easy task and the cost was a concern as the alternative products was sometimes three or four times as more expensive which had to be absorbed by the service or the customer. The more people that change to using alternative products to SUPs and stop purchasing unnecessary SUPs the more the prices will fall. He continued that in some circumstances the use of plastic packaging prevents other types of waste and gave the example that a cucumber remains fresh far longer if it is wrapped in cling film.

Mr Benson, Principal Heritage Coast Officer advised that the beaches were cleaned by volunteers and the proposals provide a strong message to these volunteers that was hopefully they won't need to be cleaned as much in the future.

Mrs Holding commented on fruit and vegetables in shops and how last week she was encouraged to use a paper bag instead of the plastic bag and asked if anything was being done in the county to encourage this.

Ms Burrell, Waste Strategy Team Manager responded that the government is to introduce the Extended Responsibility Scheme looking at all options for using the tax system to address SUP waste or economic discounts if they use a paper bag as an alternative. She continued that this was seen as the next drive to push the agenda forward.

The Chairman indicated that the meeting had been of considerable interest to Members and that DCC and partners were already carrying out work prior to the resolution at the Council Meeting. The work which had been undertaken was a true reflection on efforts to reduce plastics in the Council and County Durham. He thanked officers and partners and then summarised the discussion as follows: that the committee acknowledges the significant work undertaken by DCC and partners; that the committee welcomes the implementation of the 'quick wins' already implemented; the committee supports the introduction of a bespoke local pledge for County Durham; that DCC and partners continue to offer reward schemes for the use of alternative of alternatives to SUPs; that DCC and partners reconsider using SUP 'free gifts' at future promotional events and that DCC and partners develop a communications plan to ensure that residents are informed when and why alternatives to SUPs are being used, that information is clear on the various types of plastic used and what can and cannot be recycled and that there is an opportunity for residents to identify how SUPs usage can be reduced.

**Resolved:** (i) That the considerable work undertaken in the last 6 months towards reducing the use of Single Use Plastics by the County Council and its partners be noted.

(ii) That the report and presentation be noted.

(iii) That the comments made by Members at the meeting form the Overview and Scrutiny response to the SUPs Task Group final report and that the committee's response is shared subsequently with both the COSMB and Cabinet accordingly.

(iv) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny receive a further presentation and report detailing progress made against the future actions identified in the report at the meeting of the committee on 5th April 2019.