

**Environment and
Sustainable Communities
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**



24 November 2021

Single Use Plastics Project - Update

**Report of Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods
and Climate Change**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide members of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a progress report on the work to reduce the use of Single Use Plastics in Durham County Council and across County Durham.

Executive summary

- 2 Members will be provided with information relating to progress made against the Single Use Plastic action plan to date.

Recommendations

- 3 That Environment and Sustainable Communities OSC (ESC OSC):
 - a) Receive this report and comment accordingly; and
 - b) Receive a future presentation detailing progress made against the actions identified within the report linking into the wider Climate Change agenda.

Background

- 4 The Committee has previously agreed to monitor progress in relation to the SUPs action plan and has received several update reports and presentations with the most recent being via a briefing report sent out to members of the committee in March 2021.

- 5 When considering its work programme in July 2021, the ESC OSC agreed that an update on the action plan should come to a formal meeting of the committee to be held in November 2021.

Detail

- 6 Since 12 November, 2018, in advance of Government legislation being introduced, the SUP task group (consisting of both internal and external partners) has made significant progress towards the reduction of single use plastics across County Durham which has attracted both national and local publicity. Work to date has included the following:
 - The adoption of a bespoke County Durham SUP pledge where residents and organisations can join a growing army of volunteers to reduce and seek alternatives to SUPs. 301 individuals and organisations have signed the pledge since March 2019 (which has celebrity endorsement as featured by Matt Baker from the BBC's One Show);
 - A 90% reduction in the use of single use plastic catering supplies used across DCC and its partner organisations e.g. plastic stirrers have been replaced with reusable ones where possible and the use of 'Vegware' introduced as an alternative to SUP;
 - A DCC reusable cup has been introduced and promoted to DCC staff – over 713 have been sold to date;
 - Schools across County Durham have been promoting 'plastic free' days and eliminating the use of SUPs across their catering functions by washing, returning and reusing meal trays (St. Bede's, RC Primary School at Sacriston, BBC, One Show, media coverage). St Joseph's RC Primary School at Ushaw Moor received local media coverage including T.V. coverage on Tyne and Tees TV in February, 2020 in relation to their single use plastic reduction efforts;
 - Initiatives to reuse plastic containers has been introduced within Durham University catering premises and discount incentives on purchases has been promoted to students (525 reusable containers have been issued to students for reuse);
 - Partners have been promoting Northumbrian Waters 'Refill' initiative, which have grown in number from 83 to 271 Refill stations now located across County Durham in bars, restaurants and public locations. Residents and staff across County Durham are encouraged to carry a reusable water bottle at all times;
 - Trials of using 6.5 tonnes of unrecyclable plastic within Highway road schemes has been introduced on A689, near Sedgfield, County Durham.

- The Gala Theatre in Durham City has prevented throwing 750kg per year of SUP confetti into the audience per year at the end of each performance by introducing paper confetti as an alternative;
- Leisure Centres across County Durham have stopped providing blue plastic overshoes at the poolside which has saved 2.4 tonnes of SUP going for disposal per year;
- Introduced trails of crisp packet recycling in County Hall via the Walker's crisp packet recycling scheme – over 10,000 crisp packets have been collected and sent for recycling since the scheme was introduced in January 2019. Partners are also supporting this scheme e.g. Beamish Museum and the Land Registry;
- Introduced additional trials of on street recycling containers within Durham City Centre;
- Adopted a SUP logo for Partners and suppliers to give public recognition of their commitment to reduce SUPs across County Durham.
- Delivered 83 community talks and roadshow events across County Durham in relation to reducing SUP's and offering waste awareness advice since the start of the project.
- Encouraged the supply chain via DCC's procurement processes and the North East Procurement Organisation to encourage contractors and suppliers to prevent or seek alternatives to SUPs;
- Shared examples of best practice across the Country and regionally to assist others reduce SUPs;
- Won both a 2019 local County Durham Environment Award and a national Local Authority Recycling Committee (2019 LARAC) award (Waste Prevention and Partnership categories).

7 Despite the Covid-19 global pandemic and the restrictions associated with it, the SUP task group has still made progress in relation to reducing SUPs across County Durham during 2020. Work in relation to this area has included; procurement of goods and services, trading services, DCC policy changes and communications. Various aspects of direct community engagement by the council and its partners has stalled during this time (e.g. information to schools and community groups). Appendix 2 details the work to date in relation to reducing SUPs across County Durham. The SUP Task group is keen to regain the momentum relating to this topic and build upon its successes it gained pre pandemic. The task group, now chaired by Victoria Burrell, Waste Strategy Team Manager (Durham County Council) meets quarterly.

8 A major legislation change occurred in relation to the reduction of single use plastics. From the 1st October, 2020 a restriction on the supply of

plastic straws, stirrers and cotton-buds came into force in England. The Environmental Protection (Plastic Straws, Cotton Buds and Stirrers) (England) Regulations 2020, make it an offence to:

- Supply or offer to supply single use plastic straws to any end user, with exemptions.
- Supply or offer to supply single use plastic stemmed cotton buds to any end user, with exemptions.
- Supply or offer to supply single use plastic drink stirrers.

The restrictions on the supply of straws, cotton buds and stirrers apply in relation to England only. The offences apply only to persons acting in the course of a business. They do not apply, for example, to individuals supplying the restricted items to other family members or to house guests. Business' compliance of this legislation will be monitored via the council's Community Protection Service. Of note, further legislative measures regarding the production and recyclability of plastics, has been proposed via the Government's Plastic Tax due to be implemented from April 2022. This is one of the proposals associated with the Government's Resources and Waste Strategy future reform. The EU and U.K banned the export of contaminated and highly mixed plastic waste to non-OECD countries from 1 January 2021. Defra estimates that around 210,000 tonnes of plastic wastes are exported each year from England to non-OECD countries. Such legislation, going forward will significantly assist with the unnecessary production and reduction of single use plastics not only across England but also across County Durham.

Conclusion

- 9 This report and attached action plan (appendix 2) provide a comprehensive update on how the actions to reduce single use plastics across County Durham have been achieved to date both pre and during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 10 Appendix 3 provides a future draft action plan for the period 2021- 2023 for the task group to take forward and implement in order to facilitate the growing SUP reduction network.

Background papers

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

The reduction of single use plastics supports the Climate Change agenda.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable