

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 9 August 2018

Single Use Plastics

Item number	7.13
Report number	
Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	
Council Commitments	23

Executive Summary

Following recent media coverage and concern relating to the impact of plastics on the wider environment this report discusses the role of the Council, and other stakeholders, in responding to these concerns, and sets out ways in which the Council deals with these issues.

This report discharges the following motions:

- Motion by Councillor Burgess to Transport and Environment Committee, [August 2017](#) – Reducing Plastic Bottle Pollution.
- Motion by Councillor Burgess to Full Council, [September 2017](#) – Public Water Bottle Refill Scheme.
- Motion by Councillor Burgess to Full Council, [September 2017](#) requesting a report on the introduction of water refill points.
- Motion to Full Council by Councillor Mowat [December 2017](#) - Plastic Free Coastlines promoted by Surfers Against Sewage.
- Motion to Full Council by Councillor Whyte [June 2018](#) – Public Water Fountains

Single Use Plastics

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.
- 1.2 In particular Committee is asked to note that Changeworks have been instructed to develop a plastic water bottle refill scheme, and to develop messaging around single use plastics in their educational activities, as a result of these motions.
- 1.3 Committee is asked to note the intention to propose Plastic Free Communities actions alongside other actions as part of the development of Litter Prevention Action Plans as these are developed across the city.
- 1.4 Committee is asked to discharge these motions.

2. Background

- 2.1 This report provides information in relation to the Council's work to manage plastic pollution in relation to the following motions and sets this in the wider context of activities which are being taken by other stakeholders including government and industry.
- 2.2 Motion by Councillor Burgess to Transport and Environment Committee, August 2017 – Reducing Plastic Bottle Pollution “Committee: Recognises the large quantity of plastic bottles that are currently disposed of and littered in the City and end up polluting the environment; Notes the interest at national level in a deposit return system for drinks containers and agrees that Edinburgh Council should write to Scottish Ministers in support of this initiative; Notes the success of such systems, especially in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries, at reducing both litter and associated costs for local authorities; Further notes that plastic bottles are used during Edinburgh council service delivery, including school packed-lunches, and requests a report on ways of reducing this use.”
- 2.3 Motion by Councillor Burgess to Full Council, September 2017 – “By Councillor Burgess – Public Water Bottle Refill “The Council: 1) Recognises the high environmental and financial cost in dealing with plastic bottle waste in the city; 2) Welcomes steps to introduce a deposit return scheme for such bottles and other forms of recyclable or re-usable materials; 3) Recognises also that Edinburgh's high quality public water supply represents an opportunity to reduce demand for bottled water and the associated plastic waste; 4) Recognises the health benefits from greater consumption of water, reducing risks of obesity and dental decay from high sugar drinks;5) Therefore agrees to investigate a pilot scheme to provide public water bottle refill facilities in a number of high footfall locations in the city, taking

account of experience elsewhere in the UK and other countries; and submitting a report within 3 cycles.”

- 2.4 Motion to Transport and Environment Committee 21 September 2017 by Councillor Burgess requesting a report on the introduction of water refill points.
- 2.5 Motion to Full Council by Councillor Mowat 14 December 2017: “Welcomes the campaign Plastic Free Coastlines being promoted by Surfers Against Sewage which looks to reduce single use plastics to prevent them ending up in the seas and oceans and considers that supporting such a campaign could reduce landfill, litter and costs and asks officers to engage with the campaign and report back in two cycles to the Transport and Environment Committee detailing how the Council could support this.”
- 2.6 Motion to Full Council by Councillor Whyte June 2018 “Notes the widespread public concern over pollution caused by plastics and the actions the Council and others are taking to reduce and recycle plastic, in particular through the use of reusable drinking bottles which avoid plastic waste; notes that there is a report being brought forward to the Transport & Environment Committee in August, currently titled Reducing Plastic Bottle Pollution, which will deal with the many facets of this issue, including the provision of water bottle refill points; recognises the timing difficulties in provision of public drinking fountains before the summer Festivals this year but recognises the significant role that the Council may have on the numbers of plastic bottles used in Edinburgh through similar measures; recognises the role that other organisations can play in the city including, for example, the University of Edinburgh which is, commendably, expanding the number of water fountains on their campus to approximately 200 in the course of the next 18 months; instructs officers to include discussion and recommendations on the provision of water fountains as part of the August report to the Transport & Environment Committee.”

3. Main report

- 3.1 Pollution in relation to the disposal of plastics has been the subject of the scrutiny in recent times particularly because of concerns about the impact on the wider environment, due to plastic entering the food chain and directly poisoning wildlife, accumulating in oceans or on land, and also breaking down into microplastics and entering the food chain.
- 3.2 Plastics are widely used throughout daily life and the sources of these are many. While much of the focus is on single use packaging plastics which we see and use on a daily basis, there are many other sources a number of which are discussed below.
- 3.3 The Council (as a producer of waste and a manager of waste) is one stakeholder in the chain of plastics use. To affect change all parts of the chain need to play their part, including manufacturers and retailers, government, waste producers and service users.
- 3.4 Many of the plastic “nurdles” (the small pieces which are increasingly being found on beaches) are associated with manufacturing. Many of the plastics being found in

the oceans are thought to originate in the developing world where waste disposal systems are not in place. These plastics then escape into water bodies and are flushed out to sea. Other examples may be shipping (e.g. as a result of wrecks <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-28582621>).

- 3.5 In the developed world where waste is managed in a more controlled way the main sources of loose plastic would be litter, spillages, etc. However there are less obvious causes such as the use of microplastics in hygiene products, and fibres from clothing which detach during washing; these are washed down sinks or drains and are too small to be captured in sewage treatment. These are then released into the environment. Similarly inappropriate disposal of cotton buds, wipes and even larger items such as nappies means these enter the sewer system then escape to the wider environment. These are a greater problem for the water industry than for Council, but ultimately these can be washed on to beaches as litter.
- 3.6 The Council's primary duty in managing plastic is to deal with the waste which people produce at home or on the move, which it does using a combination of litter and waste collection, and disposal of the materials by recycling, energy recovery and disposal to landfill in line with the waste hierarchy.
- 3.7 In terms of preventing waste arising in the first place the Council's role is more limited. It does not control what products are placed on the market. It does however have an engagement and education role to raise issues and it does this via a variety of routes, often working with partner organisations.
- 3.8 The Council as an organisation uses and disposes of plastics in its business, and is developing approaches to this, primarily via catering operations.
- 3.9 Significant progress to prevent waste at source however requires action by other stakeholders, in particular government and producers. Examples of how this is being delivered are provided below.
- 3.10 It should be noted however that in spite of the known problems associated with plastics, all materials have some impact on the environment. Simply replacing plastics with other materials may have unintended consequences. Just because something can be labelled compostable or biodegradable it is not necessarily an improvement for the environment.
- 3.11 Retailers and manufacturers have agreed packaging reduction targets with government. This is called the Courtauld Commitment, information about which can be found at www.wrap.org.uk/content/what-is-courtauld . This has been in place for a number of years, and in some cases has meant that plastic packaging has replaced other materials, or new products have been developed which rely on plastic (e.g. laminated foil/plastic coffee refills which reduce use of glass jars). In some cases the use of plastic as a barrier in food packaging allows other materials such as cardboard to be recycled.
- 3.12 In some cases therefore replacing plastic could potentially increase waste arisings overall.

National Actions to Prevent or Recycle Plastics

- 3.13 At both UK and Scottish levels the governments have been proposing measures to reduce plastic pollution.
- 3.14 A number of initiatives has been proposed. Charges for the use of carrier bags are now in place in each part of the UK, and this reduced plastic use in particular (because most bags are made of plastics). A ban on the use of microplastics in hygiene products such as toothpaste and face scrubs commenced in the UK in June 2018.
- 3.15 Further bans, restrictions, taxes or charges are likely. The Scottish Government is expected to bring forward a ban on plastic cotton buds, while action is likely at the UK level on disposable cups (which contain a layer of plastic).
- 3.16 National retailers and brands have taken action to reduce the use of plastics, whether by stating that they will phase out or reduce plastic packaging, or reformulate packaging to make it easier to recycle (e.g. by replacing black plastic with other types).
- 3.17 A particular focus in Scotland has been the development of a deposit return scheme for certain types of packaging including plastic bottles. Zero Waste Scotland are the lead body developing this. The detail of how it works and the way it interacts with existing recycling schemes and works to prevent littering will follow the consultation currently being undertaken by the Scottish Government.
- 3.18 Some retailers, bars, etc are proactively replacing straws, cups, cutlery etc with cardboard or compostable versions.
- 3.19 All of the above schemes and proposals targets different products in different ways. These measures will reduce plastic in the environment but are not necessarily designed to address the wider environmental issues associated with littering or overconsumption. A cardboard straw or cotton bud will eventually break down but until it does it is still a litter problem and may also be hazardous to wildlife.
- 3.20 A significant barrier to recycling plastics is the lack of markets which has been exacerbated by the reliance among western nations upon exporting recyclable materials. The Scottish Government, through Zero Waste Scotland, has recently provided funding to establish a mixed plastic recycling facility in Perthshire, to recycle some of the more problematic materials into oils or chemicals. This is a small scale facility but if successful it could lead to the establishment of a network of facilities. It cannot resolve the current issues but may prove to be an important first step.

Local Action in Relation to Household Waste and Litter

- 3.21 The Council's primary focus is on managing the waste that other people produce, either through waste and recycling, or litter, collection and disposal.
- 3.22 The Council no longer operates a commercial waste service, except to its own buildings. Therefore almost all waste is either household waste or litter.

- 3.23 The Council's Waste Compliance Team, and Environmental Warden teams, both work to ensure that commercial waste is properly disposed of, and in particular properly contained so as not to become litter.
- 3.24 The Council's approach to managing waste is set out in its Waste and Recycling Strategy which covers the period through to 2025. A review of this strategy is subject to a separate report to this committee.
- 3.25 The forward plan for the review of Waste and Recycling Strategy contains a number of actions which seek to address plastic related issues either directly or as part of the wider waste stream. For example the development of the communal bin review would be expected to result in more plastic being diverted from landfill; actions to improve management of litter and to develop community focussed cleanliness initiatives will mean less material (including plastics) loose in the local environment, which represent a risk to wildlife or the wider environment.
- 3.26 The Council's current recycling services mean that it is possible to recycle a range of single use plastics (specifically plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays). These are sorted for recycling. Any which cannot be sold at that time will be used as a fuel rather than landfilled.
- 3.27 Recycling participation varies by service, and by type of plastic. People are more likely to recycle plastic bottles than other plastics, and higher levels of recycling are present in kerbside recycling areas, than in communal bin areas. Work has commenced to close these gaps with the review of the communal bin services over the next three years. In particular the review highlights the refuse analysis which suggested that the kerbside collection was capturing up to 85% of some drinks bottles.
- 3.28 Waste from litter bins and street sweepings is sent for sorting and reprocessing to allow some to be recycled, and in the near future used to generate energy.

Prevention of Waste at Source

- 3.29 The Council's main focus in preventing waste at source is focussed on community action. This is delivered in a range of ways but often involves working with stakeholders. For example prior to the introduction of carrier bag changes, the Council provided financial support to community focussed reusable carrier bag schemes. It was felt that this approach would be preferable to (for example) simply giving reusable bags to people.
- 3.30 The Council is currently working with two Zero Waste Towns projects. These are community led projects which are funded to deliver projects aimed at moving towards zero waste. These do not target plastics specifically but do provide an opportunity to encourage more sustainable use of plastics as part of these projects.
- 3.31 In south Edinburgh the Council is supporting Shrub's work to target the student community. The first pilot was an end of term collection in Marchmont designed to tackle dumping at the end of term and encourage reuse of household goods.
- 3.32 In Leith Changeworks are leading on Zero Waste Leith. The first project is actively targeting fly-tipping which again means that less waste is loose in the environment.

Engaging Communities

- 3.33 The Council uses various methods to communicate with residents. In particular Our Edinburgh campaigns have focussed on targeted messages- litter during the Festival or fly-tipping in tenement areas, which would be expected to reduce littering and so better control waste of all types.
- 3.34 Localities teams work to support community actions such as clean ups.
- 3.35 The mailing to introduce the garden waste charge will be accompanied by a recycling guide which promotes recycling by material stream to reinforce those messages.
- 3.36 The Council funds Changeworks to deliver community engagement and education around waste and recycling on its behalf. This work includes specific projects, education in schools, and community engagement activities on behalf of Waste and Cleansing, and now targeted support for Localities.
- 3.37 Reusable water bottles are now used quite widely and options to support their use on the go, as opposed to buying a single use water bottle, are growing. There is already a national programme in place at www.refill.org.uk whereby participating organisations such as cafes allow people to obtain free water on the go. This is already supported by Whitbread across the UK so there are points in place and promoted at branches of Costa and Premier Inn www.costa.co.uk/responsibility/our-cups while a similar project is being developed by Network Rail for the railway stations they manage including Waverley Station.
- 3.38 It had been expected that Changeworks would be developing a pilot scheme for refilling water bottles as part of Zero Waste Leith. Because they have not done so, Waste and Cleansing has built this into Changeworks' funding agreement for 2018/19.
- 3.39 They are also required to develop messaging around single use plastics as part of their schools education programmes. These have already been expanded to cover litter issues.
- 3.40 It is felt that this approach, which will promote the schemes in existence, will use existing infrastructure, and will be more controlled than (for example) public fountains, will be more cost effective and hygienic than developing a new infrastructure which may be based around outdoor points (e.g. in parks).

The Council as a Waste Producer

- 3.41 Management of waste in Council buildings is devolved to local building managers and business managers who are responsible for working with the Facilities Management Teams. Waste and Cleansing provide the collection service while the internal infrastructure (i.e. bins and sacks) is the responsibility of the local building managers.
- 3.42 All Council buildings should use the waste and recycling services provided by Waste and Cleansing. The policy to this effect was agreed at Transport and Environment Committee in May 2018 (Appendix 1)

- 3.43 The most visible source of single use plastics within the Council is perhaps in the catering operations. The use of plastics in schools in particular was subject to a report to the Education, Children and Families Committee in May 2018.
- 3.44 However the Catering Service is also taking action more widely, for example by introducing incentives to use reusable cups which are in line with those operated by national coffee shops. This is being carried out as cafes are upgraded.

Cleanliness

- 3.45 There is no need for plastic to enter the environment. If waste is placed in a bin it should be collected for either disposal (landfill or energy recovery) or recycling. The use of bins instead of sacks in most of the city helps in this objective.
- 3.46 However waste can still escape through spillage, continued use of sacks in some areas, or simply by people dropping litter. In communal bin areas, some of the pilots to deliver the enhanced collection service previously agreed by Committee will feature housings which ultimately offer potential to better contain waste.
- 3.47 While the Council carries out routine cleansing work, all stakeholders need to work together to make the city clean. This is a key way to reduce the escape of plastic into the environment. Initiatives which are already underway to improve the cleansing of the city include using sensors to better target the emptying of litter bins, and potentially to inform siting of bins. However if people drop litter this will not make the city clean.
- 3.48 The development of Locality Improvement Plans will assist in engaging communities in this. Initially Waste and Cleansing will be working with North East Locality and Zero Waste Scotland to develop a Litter Prevention Action Plan at the community level. By ensuring that community members (such as businesses) realise they need to be active participants in the process, which is in line with the Scottish national policy, it is hoped to make the city cleaner of all materials, including plastics.
- 3.49 It is envisaged that similar plans can be delivered across the City in due course.

Plastic Free Coastlines and Plastic Free Communities

- 3.50 Surfers Against Sewage operate these two schemes. Information is available at: www.sas.org.uk
- 3.51 Plastic Free Communities are a means to achieve Plastic Free Coastlines (e.g. free of cotton buds, plastic bags, etc). A copy of the Tool Kit is provided here: www.sas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Plastic-Free-Coastlines-Community-Toolkit.pdf
- 3.52 Surfers Against Sewage also provide advice for Plastic Free Councils: www.sas.org.uk/advice-plastic-free-councils
- 3.53 Surfers Against Sewage suggest that the role of the Council is to review its own activities as a waste producer, and also to support local communities to develop their own action plans. It is thought that tightly focussed plans rooted in a local community are likely to be more successful than a more broad “citywide approach”.

- 3.54 This is consistent with the National Litter Strategy for Scotland and The Council's own approach of Locality Improvement Plans. As part of this approach, North East Locality are about to commence development of a Litter Prevention Action Plan for that area with support from Waste and Cleansing and Zero Waste Scotland. The actions promoted by Surfers Against Sewage will be shared with stakeholders as potential actions they could adopt as part of developing their own individual action plans.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 Reduction in littering and waste arising as a result of measures to reduce use of disposable waste.
- 4.2 Participation in refill scheme (measured by number of locations offering the scheme).

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 There are no direct financial impacts arising from the report.
- 5.2 If the initiatives taking place at a national level result in a reduction in either littering or waste arisings this would be expected to result in a financial benefit.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 Measures to reduce waste at source and improve management of waste are in line with the Council's corporate objectives.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 There is no direct equalities impact arising from this report.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 Measures to prevent waste arising, to encourage recycling and to divert waste from landfill to energy recovery have a positive environmental impact.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Development of actions to prevent waste at source and prevent litter are dependent upon engagement.

10. Background reading/external references

10.1 None.

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

Contact: Andy Williams, Waste and Cleansing Manager

E-mail: andy.williams@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 5660

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 Waste from Council Premises

Waste from Council Premises

- It is the Council's policy that all of its premises must comply with the internal Resource Use Policy, as well as the Waste (Scotland) Regulations and all other relevant legislation.
- The Resource Use Policy requires the waste hierarchy to be applied, to reduce, reuse and recycle, and in addition as a minimum to ensure that facilities are in place to recycle: paper, card, cans, plastics, glass and food, as well as to collect residual mixed waste for landfill.
- Procedures must be put in place to manage specialised waste streams not covered by general household waste provision (e.g. engine oil).
- It is the responsibility of building managers, in partnership with the Facilities Management team covering that building, to ensure compliance on a site by site basis, and to arrange collection of the above materials by the Waste and Cleansing Service.
- All steps must be taken to maximise use of the recycling services and prevent their contamination with other materials, through the use of adequate signage, the use of correct coloured sacks, and staff training.
- It is expressly forbidden to mix separately collected and mixed waste streams.