

Reduction in the Use of Single Use Plastics: A Strategy for Somerset County Council

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Cabinet Member: Councillor David Hall, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure

Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

1.1. In February 2018 the Council made the following resolution:

This Council resolves to ask the Cabinet Member for Resources:

- 1. To work with partners, suppliers and customers to develop a strategy and timetable to make Somerset County Council (SCC) a 'single-use-plastic-free' authority, specifically the phasing out of sales of SUP bottles and other SUP products across all premises and events;*
- 2. To present the strategy and timetable to Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place before consideration at Full Council in November 2018;*
- 3. To actively encourage the institutions, businesses and residents of Somerset to adopt similar measures;*
- 4. To lobby the Somerset MP's for national legislation on reducing the use of SUP's;*
- 5. Actively encourage additional plastics recycling facilities through the Somerset Waste Partnership.*

1.2. This report presents the draft Strategy to the Policies and Place Scrutiny for consideration before it is presented to Council next month.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

2.1. Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the growing concern locally, nationally and globally about the impact single use plastics are having on our environment, and that action is needed to reverse

this trend of negative impacts. The Council can act positively in reducing the use of plastics, and can use its position of influence with partners, providers and stakeholders, and this Strategy is designed to provide a framework for this work.

2.2. Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Policies and Place Scrutiny Committee consider the draft “Single Use Plastics: A Strategy for Somerset County Council” and that any suggestions for amendment(s) are then put forward with the Strategy to the Council in November for adoption.

3. Background

- 3.1.** The County Council is a Waste Disposal Authority, and the District Councils are Waste Collection Authorities. These statutory duties are delivered through the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP), which produces a five-year Business Plan. The Council and its District Council partners in the Somerset Waste Partnership collaborate to progress the reduction of single use plastics as part of their work to increase recycling and reduce residual waste disposed to landfill.
- 3.2.** The issue of single use plastics has risen in prominence over the last few years. Popular awareness has been raised via initiatives such as Sky’s “Ocean Rescue”. Many organisations, councils and businesses have pledged to go “single use plastics-free”. Concern expressed by consumers about the use of plastic is growing, and demand for alternatives (such as plastic-free shops, fruit and veg not being packaged in plastic) is increasing. A number of major businesses have signed up to the Plastics Pact including Asda, Boots, M&S and Morrisons. The Pact seeks to create a circular economy for plastics, and brings together not only businesses but also UK government and NGOs to tackle the negative impacts of plastic waste.
- 3.3.** In Somerset, along with the County Council, other local authorities have also resolved to reduce or ban the use of single use plastics. In addition to committing to reducing single-use plastic use, the County Council has worked towards increasing recycling plastic (as well as other recyclates). Examples of actions taken include plastic-specific recycling bins in its kitchen and participation in the “Refill” initiative (which allows access for members of the public to refill their water bottles with the aid of the Refill phone app). Members are provided with jugs of water and glasses at meetings rather than plastic bottles. The Leader of the Council Councillor Fothergill is our first Single Use Plastics Champion, providing leadership to this work from the very top of the organisation.

- 3.4.** The Somerset Waste Partnership is driving the change in behaviour on plastics in Somerset, and has introduced the “Pledge Against Preventable Plastics”. All recycling sites now accept rigid plastic pots, tubs and trays as well as plastic bottles. The Partnership’s Business Plan 2019-2024 is being reported to the Board at the end of September 2018 (and subsequently reported to each partner for consideration and approval) and this reflects the drive towards more recycling and reuse of materials, and the avoidance of unnecessary waste.
- 3.5.** It is in this context that the County Council made its decision in February to move towards becoming single use plastics-free, and to use its influence with providers, partners and stakeholders to help them do the same.

4. What the Strategy does

- 4.1.** The Strategy sets out the issue that we are trying to address and how the Council will tackle this important matter. It not only gives a strategic framework for the Council’s own activities, and how the work fits with the general direction for dealing with waste (which provides a well-known hierarchy of reduce-reuse-recycle-recovery-disposal for us to work within) but also how SCC will work with its partners and providers. It will show how we will work closely with the Somerset Waste Partnership to raise awareness of the issues of Single Use Plastics with partners, local businesses and communities and how their usage can be reduced. By commissioning various providers to undertake a wide range of activities, the Council is in a strong position to make decisions and influence others to act responsibly when it comes to the use of plastics.
- 4.2.** The actions in the Strategy are based on the waste hierarchy; to reduce the amount of plastic used is the clear priority. This means assessing current practices, enabling people to reuse the plastic that we use, providing good quality and convenient recycling facilities, and ensuring staff, providers and partners can make informed and sustainable choices when it comes to their plastic use.
- 4.3.** Raising awareness and working in partnership are key principles of the Strategy; the County Council is mindful of the benefits of working with others and of its ability to influence behaviour and actions, including enforcing action (through including clauses/conditions in contracts with providers around their use of plastics).
- 4.4.** An Action Plan is part of the Strategy which sets out specific tasks to meet its strategic objectives. This includes what SCC will do itself, how it will raise awareness and how it will work with partners.

- 4.5.** The Action Plan sets out a realistic timeframe for delivery, mindful of what are the priority actions, resources, and financial considerations.

5. Financial considerations

- 5.1.** The current financial situation of the County Council has to be taken into account, and the ability to assign resources to deliver this Strategy. It is simply not reasonable or realistic to expect quick delivery and significant resources to be allocated to this work. As such, the timescale for delivery allows for flexibility and is not too rigid to tie officers to unreasonable demands at a time when the priority is to deliver statutory services and to ensure the financial stability and sustainability of the Council.

6. Consultations Undertaken

- 6.1.** Plastics are a standing item on the SWP's Senior Management Group, which enables collaboration between the councils and the Partnership. The SWP is an important part of the work and the partnership acts as an effective facilitator of bringing Somerset's Councils together to deliver a more environmentally friendly level of plastics use.
- 6.2.** This report and the Strategy have been shared with partners and senior officers in the most relevant services (Property, Facilities Management, Commissioning, Commercial and Procurement) and the Cabinet Member. The direction of travel has the support of the Council's Senior Leadership Team and, as noted above, the Leader of the Council is the Single Use Plastics Champion. The Strategy has been shared with these individuals.

7. Implications

- 7.1.** Financial Implications: alternatives to plastic are likely to be more expensive. This will have to be taken into account in the decision making process.
- 7.2.** Legal Implications: there are no current legal implications however part of the Strategy relates to introducing standardised contractual requirements so that providers change their behaviour (if required) and act responsibly to reduce their use of plastics.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1.** Appendix A - Draft "Single Use Plastics: A Strategy for Somerset County Council".

