



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

18TH DECEMBER 2019

ELIMINATION OF SINGLE USE PLASTICS IN ALL COUNCIL CONTRACTS AND PREMISES

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET'S CLIMATE CHANGE CHAMPION (COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS)

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to:

- 1.1 Provide members of the group with an overview of the current guidance that is in place to support organisations when seeking to eliminate single use plastics.
- 1.2 Identify those categories of spend where single use plastics are currently in circulation, or indeed, have been in circulation recently.
- 1.3 Where the use of materials cannot be avoided, and alternative arrangements have already been put in place, this report sets out the potential barriers to success. The aim of this is to inform debate, utilising the 'Waste Hierarchy', on the most appropriate and responsible way forward.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members of the Group:

- 2.1 Review the report with the aim of obtaining a greater understanding of the issues that the Council faces in eliminating its use of single use plastics.
- 2.2 Utilising the 'Waste Hierarchy' along with the lessons that we have learnt so far, debate and discuss an appropriate forward work plan that will support the Council's ambitions to eliminate single use plastics as far as it can practicably do so.
- 2.3 Note that a future report will be provided to the Group in April 2020 setting out an action plan to eliminate the use of single use plastics within the Council by 2020.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 This report seeks to understand how the Council can eliminate the use of single use plastics in all Council contracts and premises by the end of 2020.

3.2 In light of this being the first report on this area to the Group on tackling this major issue, and to ensure that the Council adopts an appropriate strategic approach to delivering achievable and sustainable outcomes, the remaining sections of this report have been summarised under the following headings:

- **WHAT IS THE WASTE HIERARCHY?**
- **MAPPING OUR CURRENT & RECENT USE OF SINGLE USE PLASTICS**
- **HOW DO WE IMPLEMENT A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION?**
- **THE NEXT STEPS**

3.3 When reviewing the information provided, and listening to the views of members of the group, the following key questions may assist:

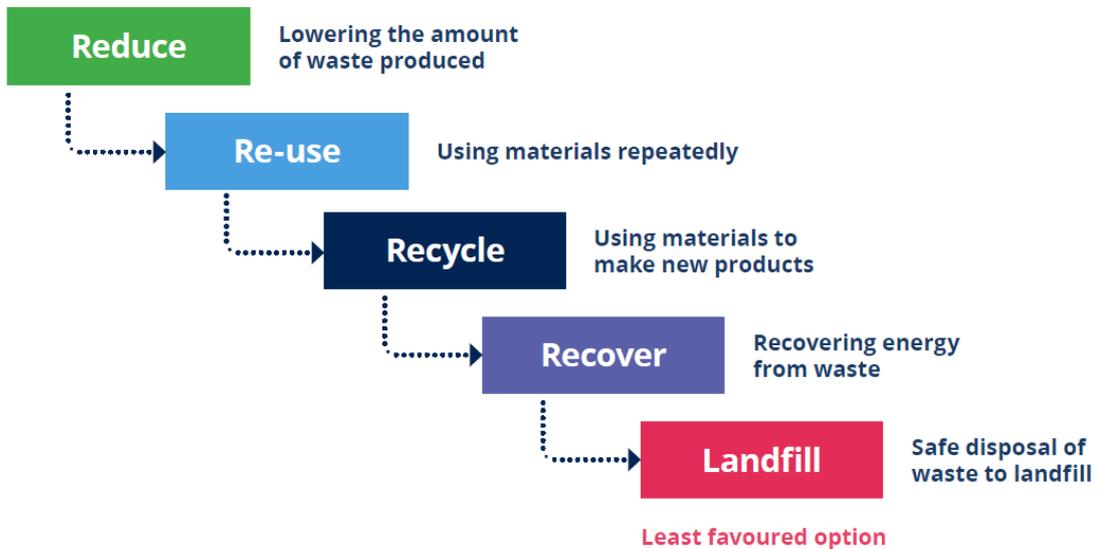
- **Where we are now, and what have we done to date?**
- **Where do we want to get to?**
- **How do we get there?**
- **Embedding arrangements**
- **How will we monitor our effectiveness?**

4. WHAT IS THE WASTE HIERARCHY?

4.1 When reviewing the use of single-use plastics, the Waste Framework Directive (2008) provides a useful and valuable waste hierarchy. The Waste Hierarchy sets out a hierarchy of options for managing waste in terms of what is best for the environment. The Waste Hierarchy is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Waste Hierarchy

Most favoured option



Source: EU Waste Framework Directive, 2008

- 4.2 A key question at the outset is to challenge ourselves with the question: ‘**Can we avoid using something in the first instance?**’, if we do this, and avoid utilising particular products then this immediately reduces the amount of waste.
- 4.3 WRAP Cymru provides a useful summary for each step of the Waste Hierarchy as follows:

REDUCE – eliminate and/or prevent the unnecessary use of plastic and the need to purchase items. For example, many organisations are now avoiding the purchase of plastic straws in all but exceptional circumstances.

RE-USE – opt for re-usable rather than single-use items. This could include challenging the use of single-use items such as coffee cups and takeaway trays by sourcing durable containers and incentivising their re-use.

RECYCLE – ensure that items which are purchased can easily be recycled (e.g. PET, HDPE and LDPE), are collected within existing recycling systems, and that compostable packaging is used only where it is sent to appropriate facilities for treatment.

RECOVER – ensure that only items that are very difficult to eliminate or recycle (e.g. multi-layer films, laminated paper, and contaminated waste) are collected to be processed through incineration.

LANDFILL – to be avoided as this is the most expensive route for disposal and has the greatest environmental impact.

4.4 The challenge for the Council now, is to apply the waste hierarchy to those areas that we have mapped (refer to Section 5). In particular, the key principle of avoidance should be at the forefront of our minds. Where the use is unavoidable, it will be essential that any alternative / replacement products can be re-used and/or recycled.

4.5 If we replace a plastic product with a product that either cannot be re-used or recycled, then we are at risk of creating a product that requires disposal, which is the least preferred option within the Waste Hierarchy.

5. MAPPING OUR CURRENT & RECENT USE OF SINGLE USE PLASTICS

5.1 In order to deliver an effective strategy that aims to reduce the quantity of single use plastics within our systems, our first task has been to map out where these materials are currently in use.

5.2 It is worth noting at this stage, that work has taken place in the past 12 to 18 months that has targeted the use of single use plastics, and in some instances these products have been replaced with ‘compostable’ alternatives. Both single use plastics and alternative compostable products are listed within the table below.

5.3 Table 1 provides a summary of the mapping exercise that has taken place.

TABLE 1 – CURRENT USE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Category of spend / services delivered	Examples of single-use plastics in use
Food	<p>Food that is served within our residential homes, primary schools and day centres is served on plates, and with cutlery – i.e. traditional sit down arrangements.</p> <p>The use of single use plastics and recent alternative materials mainly relates to meals that are served within our comprehensive schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of our comprehensive schools offer the service for children to receive their food in a container that allows them to eat in a place other than the ‘food hall’. This is known as ‘food on the go’. • In order to allow children this facility, the food is placed within a container with cutlery being provided. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Food cartons have traditionally been in the form of polystyrene containers, but these have been replaced recently with compostable alternatives. ○ Cutlery comes in the form of either bamboo or plastic knives and forks.

Category of spend / services delivered	Examples of single-use plastics in use
<p>Hot & cold drink provision at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff canteens • Residential homes for the elderly • Leisure Centres • Tourism establishments • Internal and external events 	<p>Due to the diverse nature of services delivered by the Council, a mixture of arrangements are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of ceramic cups and metal spoons within our residential homes, and some offices where training is provided to staff and external organisations. • We also have arrangements in place whereby single use plastics are used in the form of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Single use cups for hot drinks ○ Individual coffee sachets ○ Plastic tea spoons ○ Plastic stirrers ○ Single use plastics cups for cold drinks
<p>Water fountains for staff and visitors</p>	<p>Some water fountains have plastic cups put to one side for use.</p>
<p>Vending machines</p>	<p>Vending machines are in use across a number of Council establishments, such as offices, leisure centres and schools.</p> <p>The drinks for sale within these machines are traditionally provided in plastics bottles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been recent developments whereby water is being sold in metal cans, rather than plastic bottles. However, this is not been consistently applied across all of the Council's establishments. • An assessment of whether metal cans are a more suitable alternative than plastics bottles has not been carried out.
<p>Cleaning / Janitorial contracts</p>	<p>Our establishments are currently cleaned by either the Council's internal cleaning service, or an appointed contractor.</p> <p>Due to the nature of the cleaning products in use, they are often held within plastic containers.</p>
<p>The delivery of packaged supplies</p>	<p>The Council receives delivery of supplies ranging from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stationery

Category of spend / services delivered	Examples of single-use plastics in use
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I.T equipment • Office furniture
Construction projects	<p>All waste on construction projects is currently managed by appointed contractors.</p> <p>A full review of the Council's standard terms and conditions, particularly around the management of waste in general is required to take place.</p>

5.4 Having mapped out where single-use plastics are in use across the Council, the challenge now is to undertake detailed and thorough audits of these areas with the aim of identifying quantities, evaluating the current disposal arrangements in place and overlay with waste hierarchy principles, in consultation with suppliers.

6. HOW DO WE IMPLEMENT A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION?

6.1 The following section of this report focuses on the replacement of plastic packaging to deliver 'food on the go' services. The work that has taken place in this area of service provision has provided us with some valuable lessons that we need to take account of.

6.2 Whilst this is one example, it must be noted that it is the Council's intention to review all of the categories listed in Table 1 of this report, with the aim of gathering the required intelligence and subsequently applying the waste hierarchy.

A Case Study – ‘food on the go’

- 6.3 Customers at our staff canteens along with school children in our comprehensive schools eat food ‘on the go’. Previously, food ‘on the go’ would have been provided in polystyrene containers. In an attempt to eliminate the use of these containers, we have sourced what are advertised to be ‘compostable’ products.
- 6.4 These products are marked as ‘compostable’ see Figure 1.

Figure 1



- 6.5 As these products are marked as compostable, there is a ‘fair and reasoned’ assumption that these can be disposed of in our compostable food caddy bins. Alternatively, and given the lack of clarity in this area, this packaging has the look and feel of cardboard / thick paper. As a result, in practice they are also being placed within our paper recycling bins. See Figure 2.

Figure 2



- 6.6 Unfortunately, these products do not compost down within our Anaerobic Digester facility based in Bryn Pica. These replacement products only break down on mass in a suitable facility that is known as an ‘In-Vessel Composting’ facility. There are no such facilities currently operating in Wales.

In summary:

- These products are not compostable within our current food waste stream, and;
- If put into the paper or cardboard recycling facilities, they are classed as contaminants.

6.7 What we have learnt is:

The general awareness of 'Waste Hierarchy' application is very limited.

There has been no consistent approach.

Fair and reasonable assumptions have been made that replacement products are recyclable (within current waste streams).

Some replacement products that have been put in place so far, could be solving one waste issue, but inadvertently creating another.

These are key lessons that we have learned, and will be considered when developing a strategic approach to tackling the matter.

How do we achieve a sustainable solution?

6.8 We need a strategic approach that enables the management of single use plastics out of our systems and processes.

6.9 Overcoming the assumptions described above is a key challenge / factor that we need to take into account when replacing plastic products with appropriate alternatives.

6.10 We need to educate and inform our employees – good waste management awareness and practice in work, will lead to good practice at home.

6.11 The WRAP guidance as referenced in paragraph 4.3 is therefore particularly relevant to us at this stage:

*RECYCLE – ensure that items which are purchased can easily be recycled (e.g. PET, HDPE and LDPE), are collected within existing recycling systems, and that **compostable packaging is used only where it is sent to appropriate facilities for treatment.***

7. THE NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 Having introduced the concept of applying the Waste Hierarchy, mapped out where single use plastics are within our categories of spend, and learnt some valuable lessons when piloting alternative sustainable solutions, we need to:

ACTION 1

Undertake a full audit of the categories of spend, with the aim of quantifying volumes.

- This data will help to inform a Council-wide strategic approach to the issues and solutions.

ACTION 2

Review this data and overlay the Waste Hierarchy principles

- Can any of the single use plastics be **avoided**?
- Are there any suitable products available to **replace** single use plastics?
 - A factor to this work will be to ensure that any replacement products can either be re-used and/or easily recycled, in accordance with the principles outlined by WRAP Cymru.

ACTION 3

Report back following the in-depth analysis, and propose appropriate solutions that support the objective.

- This will be in the form of a Council-wide strategy that can be communicated and applied consistently across the Council's establishments / workforce.

- 7.2 In parallel to the above actions, work will take place to review the arrangements currently in place in relation to the compostable food packaging.

- 7.3 In summary, at this stage, we do not have any data in terms of quantities used across our offices, and / or schools. The case study provided within this report demonstrates the barriers faced with successfully delivering the ambition of eliminating single use plastics.

- 7.4 In order to deliver a robust approach to tackling this problem responsibly, an in-depth review of the use, quantities involved and current disposal of all products is required. This will help to inform a strategic approach. It is proposed that a follow up report will be presented to the Steering Group in April 2020, setting out an action plan to eliminate the use of single use plastics within the Council by 2020.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no equality and diversity implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 There are no consultation requirements emanating from the recommendations set out in the report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 10.1 Currently, there are no direct financial implications upon the Council's revenue budget.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 11.1 There are no legal or legislative implications emanating from the recommendations set out in the report.

12. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 12.1 This report seeks to set out the arrangements required to support the council in reducing its use of single use plastics, in doing so the recommendations to reduce the impact the Council and its residents and businesses have on the environment and respond to the issues set out in the Committee on Climate Change Report – Net Zero. The future actions that arise as a result of the recommendations in this report will be considered by the Council's Cabinet and it will take full regard to the seven national wellbeing goals.

13. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 This report sets out the guidance that the Council has available to it when seeking to eliminate single use plastics. Whilst elimination is not easy or straight forwards, the Waste Hierarchy principles provide a valuable reference point when seeking to measure how effective any arrangement could be.
- 10.2 Having provided a specific case study that outlines some of the potential barriers to the successful elimination of single use plastics, detailed work will now take place across all categories of spend in order to ensure that a robust strategic approach to eliminating single use plastics from our supply chain is delivered in a consistent and sustainable way.
- 10.3 The Council is committed to addressing this important issue, and progress reports will be presented to the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group to ensure appropriate scrutiny.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972

as amended by

THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT, 1985

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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Background Papers: None.