

REPORT TITLE	DEVELOPING THE SINGLE USE PLASTIC FREE WIRRAL POLICY
REPORT OF	MIKE COCKBURN LEAD COMMISSIONER – ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the response to the Council resolution from December 2017 regarding single use plastic and sets out proposals for an SUP Free Wirral Policy and its administration. Committee are requested to provide the Cabinet Member with comments on proposals for the SUP Free Wirral Policy in order to support its ratification and establishment. It is commonly agreed that the adverse impact SUP is having on the environment both globally and locally must be addressed and that everyone should play their part. The Council is in a position to positively influence changes in SUP use but also as a major service provider it can transform its own provision to become SUP free. The SUP Free Wirral Policy has therefore been developed to harness the Council's ability to influence change and also to set out a route map for becoming SUP Free.

Early progress has been made and arrangements are being put in place to drive SUP free, this has included establishing an SUP taskforce involving a range of interested groups and removing SUP items from catering specifications for the recent Tall Ships event. The Council's policy will involve removing SUP from service provision and from events held on Council land, including SUP free criteria for the Eco Schools programme and developing a voluntary code to enable Wirral businesses to become SUP free.

Further to the Council's resolution on single use plastics (SUP) passed in December 2017 this report also provides an overview of emerging Government policy and European legislation on SUP.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough.

The decision is not a 'key decision'.

RECOMMENDATION

Committee is recommended to:

- Consider proposals for the Single Use Plastic Free Wirral Policy and provide comments to the Cabinet Member – Environment.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

On both a European and national level, the problem of SUP is high on the agenda, therefore garnering high political support for the issue. Wirral people are concerned about the environment and the effect pollution is having on issues such as global warming. The vast majority of people completing last year's resident's survey stated they were willing to change their lifestyle to help protect the environment. The public mood and opinion about SUP and its adverse effect wild life has also been galvanized by last year's BBC's Blue Planet series which highlighted the plastic pollution of the world's oceans. This is especially relevant locally due to the coastal nature of Wirral and the issue of plastic pollution on the Borough's beaches, with groups such as the High Tiders and new Brighteners wanting to take action on the issue.

Creating a comprehensive policy on phasing out SUP and associated actions as recommended to Cabinet by Council in December 2017, puts Wirral in a leading position on SUP Free. Strategically it also supports the Wirral Plan pledge to create an attractive local environment for Wirral residents.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The Council wants to develop the SUP Free Wirral policy to make a difference and address the use of SUP, therefore the option to do nothing has not been explored other than to identify the risks and environmental impact associated with continuing to use SUP. A range of issues have been considered for inclusion within the policy, however the focus has been on affordable solutions and the identification of alternative products to replace SUP for service provision.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

People are worried about single use throw away plastic and the effect it is now having across the globe and particularly in the oceans. Public opinion has been seemingly galvanised by the BBC's Blue Planet series presented by Sir David Attenborough from late last year. In one of the programmes Sir David commented that 100 years ago plastic was heralded as the new tough and indestructible solution to the world's requirements. However that durability and resilience means plastic has become a major hazard to the world today, choking the oceans and its habitat. Since the Blue Planet 2 series concluded late last year, plastic and in particular single use plastic has received daily media coverage, including concerns raised about a river in East Manchester containing the highest levels of plastic pollution measured in the world to date (through a field study by the Environment Agency). Locally the beach combing groups who cleanse the Wirral's beaches have been raising concerns for some time about the level of plastic washed up on the beaches.

During the course of this year the national and international response to addressing single use plastic has begun to gain momentum.

EUROPEAN POLICY

In May 2018 the European Commission announced proposals for a new European directive on single use plastics with the principal aim of reducing marine plastic pollution. This will supplement the existing EU Plastics Strategy which recommended a new policy on SUP. Unlike existing EU Waste Directives, which offer member states freedom in how they prevent and reduce marine litter, this new directive contains specific actions. The Directive seeks to ban 10 of the worst SUP items for marine pollution including plastic straws and ear buds. For other SUP items the directive seeks to encourage producer lead initiatives to raise consumer awareness, reduce waste and other negative impacts.

It is unknown when and if this directive will be brought forward into UK legislation due to Britain's planned exit from the EU in 2019. However DEFRA is seeking to bring in similar UK legislation.

FUTURE UK GOVERNMENT SUP LEGISLATION

The UK Government has announced it is considering a ban on common SUP items including plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds. It is understood that such proposals will go to consultation later this year along with the other measures described below.

In March 2018 the Government announced it is considering the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for all single use drinks packaging, regardless of material. Under these proposals a levy would be charged to the consumer within the product price for the packaging. This levy can be reclaimed by the consumer by returning the packaging to a defined collection point. Therefore an incentive for recycling is created for the consumer, encouraging the public to act and be more proactive in seeking to recycle. The Government has announced that it will hold a consultation on a Deposit Return Scheme as described this year. It should be a crucial element of the SUP Free Wirral policy to respond to the DRS consultation. Deposit Return Schemes, although having potential to increase overall recycling rates could significantly reduce plastics being collected and recycled from the domestic refuse kerbside collections.

It is unlikely that 100% of the levy gathered annually through the DRS would be reclaimed by consumers. Even with a large levy on drinks packaging, people may still dispose of it via residual waste streams. Such drinks packaging mixed in residual waste would then gain value to local authorities and waste management companies. It may incentivise them to further sort residual waste to reclaim packaging to reclaim the levy; this may become economically viable in the large quantities of waste processed by companies and authorities. This could further increase recycling rates nationally.

For the levy that remains unclaimed, the Government has not yet set out how this would be used. From a local authority perspective, the revenue from unclaimed levies could subsidise local authority kerbside recycling schemes where they had become economically unviable. Wirral, other LCR authorities and the LGA could lobby for such usage of the levy during the consultation. From past experience, the Government may seek to donate the unclaimed levy to the charity sector, as is done with the 5p levy charged on plastic bags in retail.

As part of corporate and social responsibility agendas (CSR) some manufacturers have taken their own initiative to reduce SUP and plastic pollution. WRAP is facilitating the UK Plastics Pact with local authority, third sector and business partners. The aim of the initiative is to work towards a circular economy for plastic, minimising the amount of plastic entering waste streams. Work is currently underway to identify initial projects to achieve this goal as well as further goals to reduce plastic usage and develop the infrastructure necessary for a circular economy for plastics.

COUNCIL RESOLUTION ON SUP – DECEMBER 2018

At its meeting of December 2017 the Council passed a resolution on single use plastic (SUP) and requested Cabinet to undertake the following:

1. Develop a robust strategy to ensure the Council phases out SUP in its activities within the next two years.
2. Work with partners and other large institutions (e.g. the NHS) to encourage them in developing similar strategies to reduce SUP.
3. Inform the public of Wirral of the reasons for phasing out SUP and encourage them to switch to alternatives.
4. Incorporate the reduction of SUP use into Wirral Council's Waste Minimisation Strategy (regarding entire borough, not just the Council).
5. Refer all of the recommendations in this motion to Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a view to advising Cabinet how they can most effectively be delivered.
6. Ask the Cabinet Member for Environment to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, requesting that the reduction of SUP form part of any future national waste management strategy.

DEVELOPING THE SUP FREE WIRRAL POLICY

In response to the Council resolution, officers have been subsequently developing an approach to addressing SUP and formulating the SUP Free Wirral Policy, which it is proposed will include the following:

- The development of an SUP free communications and public awareness campaign which will include a briefing for all Council staff.
- Amending the Council's 'Managing our Waste Strategy' to set out the Council's commitment to becoming SUP free.
- Working with local groups and interested parties to support local schemes and audits of plastic accumulations.
- Specifying that Council services and events will operate SUP free.
- Specifying within the Council's conditions of hire that third party events held in Council facilities or on Council land must operate SUP free.

- The Council's procurement processes will be developed to provide SUP alternatives.
- The development of a voluntary SUP code for Wirral businesses in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce.
- Encourage strategic partners to adopt SUP free policies and work together to eradicate SUP.

The proposed SUP Free Wirral policy will be developed to support the Council's long term objectives for carbon reduction, adaptation for unavoidable climate change and driving behaviour change in the way people relate to their local environment through the Love Where You Live campaign.

Progress Made To Date

The Council and its partners have been able to make progress in putting into place key aspects of the SUP Free Wirral policy. These include the following:

- Council Resource and Energy Management Plan

We will be developing a Resource and Energy Management Plan for the Council this year which will provide a strategic framework for the Council's commitment to the sustainable use of resources and energy. The SUP Free Wirral Policy will be a key component of the Resource and Energy Management Plan, which will also include improving internal waste recycling provision and performance, energy generation & usage and becoming a paperless Council.

- SUP Free Wirral Taskforce

We have established an SUP Free Wirral Taskforce to coordinate SUP campaigns and action across Wirral. The taskforce, which is made of local community groups and interested individuals, has been meeting through the year with the Taskforce receiving proposals for the SUP Free Wirral Policy and providing views.

- Transforming Council Service Provision to become SUP Free

Officers from the Council's procurement, licensing and event management teams are considering the implications of moving Council service provision to SUP free and to identify early win opportunities. It is intended to consult with the Council's service managers about the implications of removing several SUP items from service provision and operation. It is the intention to follow the consultation with a timetable for the removal of these items.

- Letter to Secretary of State for Environment

Earlier this year the Cabinet Member – Environment wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment regarding suggested Government action to support SUP free and to offer Wirral as a pilot area for utilisation to move national SUP policy forward, including working

with local communities, supermarkets and the Chamber of Commerce on a range of initiatives.

- Inspiring Future Generations

Officers have been building SUP Free into Wirral's Eco Schools programme both in terms of an interactive educational package for children and to engage with school management teams regarding their procurement arrangements and use of SUP.

- Council Staff Briefing and Support to Become SUP Free

The Council's Communications Team are developing a briefing roadshow and information pack for Council staff on SUP Free, setting out the Council's commitment to become SUP free and the support to be established for staff to make it happen.

- Love Where You Live – Winning Hearts and Minds

The Council's Love Where You Live campaign is now fully established with over 20 community hubs now issuing litter picking equipment and resources to groups. We have been working with groups such as the High Tidiers and New Brighteners to highlight the amount of plastic collected from beaches as part of the ir beach combing exercises.

- Voluntary Scheme for Wirral Businesses

Officers have held initial meetings with colleagues at the Chamber of Commerce about SUP Free and discussed the principles of promoting an SUP Free voluntary code for businesses based on the 'Surfers against Sewage' criteria for SUP Free towns.

- Encouraging and Supporting Strategic Partners to Adopt SUP Free Policies

Meetings are planned with representatives of our partner organisations including the police, fire & rescue service, further & higher education and the NHS about adopting SUP Free policies and working in partnership for Wirral to become SUP free.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Establishing the SUP Free Wirral Policy will be met within existing resources in terms of the public awareness campaign, voluntary SUP free code for businesses and working with partner organisations. The Council's Procurement Team will support service managers to identify alternative products to SUP to deliver service provision, however the sourcing and purchasing of such products will again be met within existing resources.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no current legal implications relating to establishing the SUP Free Wirral Policy, however it is anticipated that the Government will launch SUP related legislation within the next 12 months. The SUP Free Wirral Policy will acknowledge and comply with any such legislation.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

The establishment of the SUP Free Wirral Policy will require a system wide approach and for the Council's workforce to understand and fully adopt the principles of the policy. The Procurement Team and those involved in purchasing supplies and materials will need to ensure identified SUP items are not purchased in the future, once prohibited. The proposed SUP Free staff roadshow and information pack to raise awareness and change approaches will therefore be important actions to successfully implement the SUP Free Wirral Policy.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

There are a number of risks associated with the development and implementation of the SUP Free Wirral Policy, these are as follows:

Risk - Lack of alternative supply options adversely affects Council service delivery –

Mitigation – The Procurement Team will work with service managers to identify alternative non SUP items, where there isn't an immediate option, timescales will be set to source and locate such items.

Risk – the SUP Free Wirral Policy is not successfully established and therefore SUP is not appropriately tackled - **Mitigation** – The policy will be fully endorsed by the Council's executive and it will be launched with comprehensive briefings for the Council's service managers and workforce.

Risk – the alternative non SUP supply items prove to be more expensive to purchase than the previous supply of SUP items, putting pressure on Council resources. **Mitigation** - suppliers are under increasing pressure to source alternative SUP supplies and materials and are in competition to do so. Procurement colleagues will identify best value for money and where the alternative is expensive or unavailable (as above); time will be given to delay the removal of the SUP item.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

The Council has established an SUP Free Wirral Taskforce to engage with local groups and individuals on issues relating to SUP and the impact on the local environment. The Council will also utilise the Live Where You Live campaign to engage local people on SUP issues and provide support for SUP free provision.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The Single Use Plastics Free Wirral Policy will be subjected to an Equality Impact Assessment as part its development and presentation to Cabinet for ratification.

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APPENDICES

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Local government media press coverage of SUP and Government announcements on consultation and proposed legislation.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
No previous Council history	