



**ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT  
COMMITTEE- 18TH SEPTEMBER 2024**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>'SINGLE USE PLASTIC' AUDIT FINDINGS AND PROPOSAL TO UPDATE THE COUNCIL'S CURRENT 'SINGLE USE PLASTIC' POLICY</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to review the effectiveness of the Council's 2018 'Single Use Plastic' policy. An internal audit of all Council buildings currently in use has been undertaken to identify any single use plastics used and procured by the Council. The findings of the audit found a range of Single Use Plastic items being used.

With the recommendation to update the current policy, the findings of the audit helped inform this update. This report will enable the Council to commit to embed Single Use Plastic reduction into the Council's procurement practices. This will involve working with suppliers to provide alternatives to Single Use Plastic products and raise awareness of Council staff and the wider brough surrounding the dangers single use plastics have to health and the local environment.

This report links in with the key themes from the Wirral Plan 2023-2027, specifically safe, resilient and engaged communities, protect our environment, promoting independence and healthier lives and people focused regeneration.

This is not a key decision.

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the findings of the Wirral Council 'Single Use Plastic' audit and
2. Approve the updated Single Use Plastic Policy.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The report highlights the findings of Wirral Council's 'single use plastic' audit and provides an overall review of the Council's 'single use plastic' policy, with recommendations to update the existing policy in line with new government legislation.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The council is required to regularly review its policies and procedures regularly, ensuring compliance with current government legislation. The information presented by the council's internal 'single use plastic' audit, supported the opportunity to revise and update the council's 'single use plastic' policy and practices.

The alternative was to not review the policy. This option was discounted as it would render the policy out of date and not in line with current legislation.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Council published its Single Use Plastic policy in July 2018, and in January 2024 to determine the success of the policy, the Climate Emergency Team audited all Council buildings currently in use, for plastics meant to only be used once for their original purpose. With support of the Asset Management team, a list of currently in use Council buildings was obtained and the officers responsible for these buildings were contacted. A criteria checker for 'Single Use Plastics' was provided to help identify the supplier they procure from and Single Use Plastics' products they use. The audit identified a range of single use plastic items procured from various suppliers such as cleaning & toiletry supplies, vending machine products & drinks, kitchen supplies, printer cartridges, pens & sticky tapes, plastic milk bottles, cutlery and plates.
- 3.2 It was also discovered that certain Council buildings are being used for public events. These events produced single use plastic waste such as plastic cups and stirrers for refreshments.
- 3.3 With 'The Environmental Protection (Plastic Straws, Cotton Buds and Stirrers) (England) Regulations 2020' and along with the findings of the council's 'Single Use Plastic' audit, it was recommended to update to the council's existing policy. In part 2, 3 & 4 of regulations, it is highlighted the offence of supplying single use plastic straws, stemmed cotton buds and drink stirrers. For example, it is stated 'A person who, in the course of a business, supplies or offers to supply to an end user a drink product with an attached plastic straw is guilty of an offence.' By This will ensure the council is leading by example when reducing the use of Single Use Plastics' products and keeping the environment protected from their effects.
- 3.4 The findings of the recent single use plastic audit have resulted in key strategic actions to be undertaken by the Council. This includes ensuring future and current suppliers offer an alternative catalogue of single use plastic free products, with

current suppliers being made aware of the councils Single Use Plastic commitments and being requested to offer an alternative list of environmentally friendly products. Additionally, the council aims to work with local partners and large institutions across the borough to make their own Single Use Plastics commitments. Finally, it is recommended the council generates public awareness around Wirral events and the new government legislation, particularly on how it will affect local businesses and the wider borough.

- 3.5 Further steps of the Single Use Plastics' audit report will be to ensure the new updated Single Use Plastics' Wirral Free policy is endorsed by the council, with its objectives implemented across Wirral Councils procedures and services. It is also understood that there are areas where the complete removal of plastics will be unavoidable, and the utilisation of the correct recycling facilities and procedures is required.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Councils have a duty to carry out inspections to make sure the rules referenced in the legal implications of this document are being followed. Inspectors can visit a shop or store, make test purchases, speak to staff, ask to see records. If businesses break the law, a fine could be issued and the business owner can be ordered to cover the cost of the investigation. This highlights the importance for the Council to lead by example in its own practices after the findings of Single Use Plastic audit.
- 4.2 During the single use plastic audit it was identified in the local leisure centre buildings across the Wirral that a number of vending machines sold single use plastic toys with single use plastic packaging. After consulting with the duty managers of the leisure centres it was found that these single use plastic products generate a percentage of profit for the centres and completely removing them would incur a financial drop in revenue. To mitigate this the supplier has been contacted and a more environmentally friendly alternative is being explored.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 From the 1st October 2023 businesses must no longer supply, sell or offer certain single-use plastic items in England. Online and over-the-counter sales and supply of single-use plastic items are banned such as polystyrene food and drink containers drinks stirrers, balloon sticks, cutlery, plates, bowls & trays, straws and cotton buds.
- 5.2 This includes all types of single-use plastic, including biodegradable, compostable & recycled plastic items wholly or partly made from plastic, including coating or lining.
- 5.3 This information is provided by the government website and follows the legislation 'The Environmental Protection (Plastic Straws, Cotton Buds and Stirrers) (England) Regulations 2020',

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 To implement the actions set by the councils SUP policy will have minimal resource implications and will be undertaken by existing resources.
- 6.2 If the council is to actively enforce the legal implications of businesses failing to comply with the new government legislation surrounding certain SUP products, the council will need to adequately staff the Trading Standards Operation team to report and investigate complaints made. Currently the team requires an increase in experienced staff to tackle the volume of reports they receive. Without this resource it will be difficult to inform and hold businesses accountable when it comes to eliminating banned SUP products.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 The risks identified with failing to comply with the new SUP legislation set out by the government have been highlighted in the financial, legal and resource implications of the report and addressed in the undertaking of the internal council SUP audit.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Wirral Council will support members of the Cool Wirral Partnership to develop and adopt their own SUP policies and strategies. The Cool Wirral Partnership coordinates local action on Climate Change, and it will be expected of members to deliver their own plans to tackle 'single use plastic' products within their own organisations and the wider borough. Organisation participating in the Cool Wirral Partnership include Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Energy Projects Plus, Faiths4Change, Forum Housing, Magenta Living, Merseyside Fire and Rescue, Merseyside Police, Merseytravel and Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.
- 8.2 Additionally an informed awareness communications campaign which was highlighted in the previous policy will be undertaken to ensure all local businesses are aware of the financial penalties and environmental impact SUP plastics and products have.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 With high levels SUP usage throughout the borough, the volumes of waste will likely be higher in areas with lower socio-economic backgrounds. This impact will affect the overall general wellbeing of the community and the attraction of local financial investment. Furthermore, a variety of environmental health issues will arise from the increase in SUP usage and wastage, with studies showing microplastics being found in the atmosphere and being absorbed through the lungs and into bloodstreams. Further reports have found studies that show 16,000 chemicals found in plastics and identifying more than 4,200 that are potentially hazardous to human health and the environment. This highlights the potential health implications lower socio-economic backgrounds face from the use and wastage produced by SUPs in their local environment and the higher levels of vulnerability they face because of this.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 In the UK, some 2.2 million tonnes of plastic packaging is consumed annually. Only 40% of this is recycled domestically. According to recent research, eight million tons of plastic waste ends up in the world's oceans each year, endangering marine life and entering the food chain.
- 10.2 Wirral is a coastal borough with numerous beaches and regular visitors, plastic waste is a threat to the natural wild and sea life that are habitual to the local area. The Wirral is home to over 500 grey seagulls which haul up on West Hoyle Bank near Hilbre Island at low tide. SUPs are notorious for affecting the health of these seagulls as they digest and become physically trapped by them, further emphasising the need for reduction and elimination of SUPs across the borough.
- 10.3 Porpoises, seals, tope, jelly fish and sharks are one of many sea creatures found in the local waters surrounding the Wirral peninsula. With higher levels of SUPs used, the higher the risk to the marine life within our local waters. By leading by example, enforcing and creating awareness to the local public about the harms of SUPs, we can protect our natural wildlife and create a hospitable clean environment for it to thrive.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Wirral Council has set out a commitment to raise public awareness of the threat and environmental impact of SUP, to work with communities to address the impact of SUP on the environment and remove SUP from Council service provision. With of a revision of the council's SUP policy, the council will take actions on providing the wider borough with guidance and support when removing SUP products and the dangers they pose to the local environment. In addition, there is a growing understanding of the risks posed to human health by toxic chemicals present in plastics.
- 11.2 Continued use and increase of SUP used throughout the borough, waste and financial resources will be expended in removing these products. These resources could be redirected to address other areas of concern for local communities.
- 11.3 With local businesses being financially penalised from the new government legislation and guidance, it will impede their monthly revenue generation. With good practice and informed action around how to comply with government legislation, local businesses can capitalise on the financial savings to be made from utilising more environmentally friendly products in their supply chain and daily activities.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1- Wirral Council's Single Use Plastic Audit Findings and Policy Review  
Appendix 2- Single Use Plastics Free Wirral Policy- September 2024  
Appendix 3- Plastic Free Event Guidance

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[The Environmental Protection \(Plastic Straws, Cotton Buds and Stirrers\) \(England\) Regulations 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uk/2020/111/1)

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This report is being considered by the Environment and Transport Committee in accordance with Section (a) of its Terms of Reference, 'in co-ordinating the response to cross-cutting sustainability issues such as reducing carbon emissions, air quality issues, climate change response, improving resource efficiency and developing sustainable energy.'

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Council - Monday, 11th December 2017 6.00 p.m.	11/12/2017
Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee- Thursday, 5th July 2018 6.00 p.m.- 103. Motion - Reducing Single Use Plastic in Wirral	05/07/2018
Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee- Thursday, 5th July 2018 6.00 p.m.- 6. Developing the Single Use Plastic Free Wirral Policy	05/07/2018
Single Use Plastics Free Wirral Policy	02/11/2018