

# **Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



“Nature is sending us a message”

## **Single Use Plastics Review**

December 2020

‘We are at a moment in time where we must come together to create change. Building on the shared values and collective efforts that have brought us together during the pandemic, we can shift to a better life for everyone. Out of the challenges we must recognise the opportunity we have before us, to work with the grain of our place and grow our economy as greener, fairer and stronger – one that includes everyone in opportunities for innovation and change – and transforms how we live, learn, work and visit in York and North Yorkshire.’

***Greener, Fairer, Stronger – Our Vision For York & North Yorkshire:***  
**York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership**

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## Background and summary of findings

Single-use plastics include any disposable plastic item designed to be used only once. We frequently use single-use plastic items in packaging, consumer products, cosmetics and healthcare. Examples are lightweight plastic bags, disposable utensils, beverage containers, coffee cups, wet wipes, and razor blades<sup>1</sup>.

As a recent report notes: 'Plastic waste often does not decompose and can last centuries in landfill, or else end up as litter in the natural environment, which in turn can pollute soils, rivers and oceans, and harm the creatures that inhabit them'.<sup>2</sup> Yet in many cases, such as plastic straws, takeaway food containers and coffee cups, there are practical SUP alternatives available that are either reusable or sustainable.<sup>3</sup>

By the 1990s, plastic waste had more than tripled in two decades and by the early 2000s plastic waste output rose more in a single decade than it had in the previous 40 years. Now 300 million tons of new plastic (equivalent to the entire weight of the human population) is made each year, half of which is for single-use plastics such as packaging and convenience foods.<sup>4</sup> An estimated 2.5 billion disposable coffee cups alone are used in the UK each year, with the majority ending up in landfill, contributing to the disastrous impact that plastics have on the environment.<sup>5</sup> The Government's "Our Waste, Our Resources" Strategy<sup>6</sup> estimates that in the UK, we use five million tonnes of plastic each year. Globally, we have produced 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic since 1950, and without action, this is expected to rise to 34 billion tonnes by 2050. Around 12.7 million tonnes of plastic are entering the ocean every year, killing over one million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals. By 2050 there could be more plastic in the ocean than fish, by weight.<sup>7</sup>

Since the broadcast of the BBC's Blue Planet II programme in autumn 2017 highlighting the effect of plastic pollution in seas, oceans and on beaches, this has become a much-debated topic with high levels of public interest. Indeed attitudes and behaviour in the UK towards plastics packaging waste have changed rapidly in recent years. A research study carried out by the charity WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) in 2018 found that 52% of UK citizens scored the issue as a high concern (scoring 8-10 out of 10) and a further 30% said they were moderately concerned (scoring 6-7 out of 10)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>[https://ieep.eu/archive/uploads/2128/IEEP\\_ACES\\_Product\\_Fiche\\_Single\\_Use\\_Plastics\\_Final\\_October\\_2016.pdf](https://ieep.eu/archive/uploads/2128/IEEP_ACES_Product_Fiche_Single_Use_Plastics_Final_October_2016.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> *Plastic Waste*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 08515, 21 September 2020 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8515/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wwf.org.au/news/blogs/10-worst-single-use-plastics-and-eco-friendly-alternatives#gs.mmg9p1>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unenvironment.org/interactive/beat-plastic-pollution/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://yorkshiretimes.co.uk/article/York-University-YORCUP-Campaign>

<sup>6</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> *How to give up plastic: a guide to changing the world, one plastic bottle at a time*, Will McCallum, Penguin Books, 2018

<sup>8</sup> <https://wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Plastic%20Packaging%20Understanding%20existing%20behaviours%20attitudes%20and%20openness%20to%20change.pdf>

Some single-use plastics are necessary for certain uses in the absence of viable alternative materials invented. As a recent House of Commons briefing paper notes: single-use plastics provide benefits in relation to contributing to food safety and hygiene, and reducing packaging weight in transit and thereby reducing energy and emissions.<sup>9</sup> A shrink-wrapped cucumber can last five times longer than an unwrapped one.<sup>10</sup> The covid-19 pandemic has also highlighted its importance in terms of its use for medical and hygiene purposes.

Pandemics notwithstanding, societal changes and attitudes (e.g. plastic bottles becoming less acceptable) and legislative changes will mean the profits of those parts of the plastic industry producing single-use plastic will fall dramatically if they fail to adapt.

The World Economic Forum has called on manufacturers to retailers involved in the plastics supply chain to accelerate their efforts to end plastic waste: “Those that step up to the challenge of environmental stewardship by contributing to the creation of a circular economy will reap a rich bounty of public trust and profitability well into the future”.<sup>11</sup>

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In 2019 the Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to convene a task group to establish how North Yorkshire County Council along with partners and members of the public could reduce the use of single-use plastics. The Committee agreed that the task group would meet once the government had published its proposals in its Resources and Waste Strategy.

The issue of how to reduce single-use plastics, reuse and recycle has been a part of North Yorkshire County Council’s work around waste reduction over several years. There are further measures to put in place though to reduce our usage of single-use plastics, some of which are relatively quick wins. There is also a role for the County Council to show leadership by amplifying action in a positive way to encourage others to reduce the use of single-use plastics. In recognition of this, the review looked at how the County Council could work with partner organisations, local businesses and residents to encourage a reduction in the use of single-use plastics across North Yorkshire.

The committee set up a task group made up of the following Members:

- Cllr. David Goode (Task Group Chairman)
- Cllr. Paul Haslam
- Cllr. Robert Heseltine
- Cllr. David Jeffels
- Cllr. Clive Pearson
- Cllr. Roberta Swiers

<sup>9</sup> *Plastic Waste*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 08515, 21 September 2020  
<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8515/CBP-8515.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> *How packaging helps waste less food*, Recyclenow.com  
<https://www.recyclenow.com/reduce-waste/packaging-and-storage/waste-less-food>

<sup>11</sup> *The plastic pandemic is only getting worse during COVID-19*, 1 July 2020, World Economic Forum  
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/plastic-waste-management-covid19-ppe/>



The task group held a series of meetings between February and December 2020 to take evidence including from North Yorkshire County Council's Procurement and Property Management Teams and from the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The task group also researched into what a number of 'best practice' local authorities were doing in response to reducing single-use plastics.

**The aims of our review were:**

To establish additional ways to reduce the use of single-use plastics by North Yorkshire County Council staff and visitors by:

- Committing to reducing our reliance on single-use plastics where practicably possible.
- Identifying sites and service areas where significant improvements can be made.
- Communicating to staff, building users and visitors the role they have to play to ensure the success of the reduction in single-use plastics.

To establish how North Yorkshire County Council can work with partner organisations, local businesses and residents to encourage a reduction in the use of single-use plastics across North Yorkshire by:

- Encouraging partner businesses, schools and young people on board across North Yorkshire to reduce single-use plastics.
- Engaging with businesses to provide strategic leadership on how they can develop their own actions with this agenda.
- Engaging with residents through our webpage, social media, case studies, press releases, and identifying how they can contribute.
- Suggesting simple changes that can be made to daily routines that will help save money, improve health and help the planet.

To look for alternatives to single-use plastics and best practice elsewhere including but not limited to other local authorities.

**The task group concluded the following:**

- Elimination of single-use plastics is not realistic at present for us but a more decisive approach to reduce usage in our buildings and amongst our suppliers with alternative products is required. The County Council needs to move this up its policy agenda; and the wider policy background including the circular economy approach embraced by the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership support us in doing this.
- The County Council has made some steps already in reducing its usage of single-use plastics but as staff in our procurement team have acknowledged there is significantly more that the County Council could do. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights in fact why we should not delay from taking a more comprehensive approach to reducing our use of single-use plastics including amongst our key suppliers.

- Work done to date by some other local authorities, shows what can be achieved in a relatively short time when there is commitment to do so.
- A starting point is for the County Council to produce a policy statement setting out some high level commitments to reduce single-use plastics in its buildings and services. Another quick win is to promote campaigns to reduce single-use plastics. The County Council's role in that regard, working with the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (YNY LEP), is to champion action to reduce single-use plastics; if we show leadership, others will come along.
- The County Council might be able to achieve a number of quick wins, particularly in relation to some of its centrally managed contracts, and we have suggested a number of ideas for officers to investigate.
- More comprehensively, to reduce the use of single-use plastics, procurement and commissioning need to work together. Directorates' policies, action plans and practices also need to be reviewed and behavioural change to occur amongst staff and our suppliers. The appointment of a senior officer champion will help achieve this, as will staff training.
- The County Council needs to update its Procurement and Management Strategy and the Procurement Service should undertake a more detailed and comprehensive supply chain audit to understand the volume and proliferation of single-use plastics among, as a minimum, all first-tier suppliers.
- The approach to reduce single-use plastics should be one of an ongoing review especially as new products come to the market and should take into account whole life product costs.
- A series of medium term measures to put in place include using scored tender evaluation questions relating to single-use plastic reduction; increasing the number of 'meet the buyer' events; and producing and regularly reviewing directorate-based action plans to reduce single-use plastics.

## Policy Background

A recent House of Commons Briefing Paper<sup>12</sup> sets out the policy background and key drivers for change as follows:

### UK Government ambitions and targets

The UK Government wants to work towards all plastic packaging placed on the market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025. Linked to this is the government's ambition of having zero avoidable waste by 2050 and the target of getting rid of avoidable plastic waste by late 2042.

The UK Government's December 2018 Resources and Waste Strategy contained a number of policies aimed at reducing plastic waste. Public consultations providing more detail on the proposals followed in February 2019. They included:

- Consultation on reforming the UK packaging-producer responsibility system;
- Plastic packaging tax: consultation;
- Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and
- Consultation on Consistency in Household and Business Recycling Collections in England.

Proposals on a deposit return scheme, consistency in recycling and reform of the extended producer responsibility systems have been included in the Environment Bill 2020. The Scottish Government has already made regulations to introduce a deposit return scheme from July 2022.

### Plastic waste

A ban on single-use plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds came into force in England in October 2020. The measure makes it illegal for businesses to sell or supply the items. A ban on cotton buds was already in place in Scotland.

Successive UK Governments have also signed-up-to many international agreements aimed at reducing plastic in the marine environment. For example, the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance. EU strategy for plastics.

The European Union has produced a European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy. This includes a recently agreed Single Use Plastic Directive, which when it comes into force in 2021, will ban specified items of single-use plastic.

The European Commission has also published a European "Green Deal" and a new Circular Economy Action Plan, which includes further proposals to reduce plastic litter and improve recycling.

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<sup>12</sup> *Plastic Waste*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 08515, 21 September 2020



## Other plastics issues

China no longer accepts certain types of plastic waste from other countries. This has meant that UK local authorities have had to find alternative ways to dispose of plastic waste, which has in turn increased their costs. Some types of black plastic and low-grade plastic cannot be easily recycled though.

Initiatives are being introduced to try to change the way that plastics are designed, produced, used, re-used, disposed of and reprocessed. Examples of these include:

- the 'Plastics Pact', a collaboration of businesses, which has set a target to eliminate unnecessary single-use plastic packaging, for all plastic packaging to be re-usable, recyclable or compostable and for 70% to be recycled or composted by 2025.
- The "Plastics Industry Recycling Action Plan" (PIRAP), an industry action plan focusing on increased collection of recyclable plastics; improved sorting; and developing end markets for recycled plastics.
- The "UK Circular Plastics Network" (UKCPN), which aims to bring together plastic product users through a programme of networking and knowledge-sharing events.
- UK supermarkets and other retailers are putting into practice a range of initiatives to reduce plastic packaging, having plastic-free aisles and allowing customers to use their own packaging containers.

## COVID-19 pandemic

The use of PPE during the COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted that for the time being, single-use plastics are essential for some medical and hygiene purposes. Indeed, single-use personal protective equipment (PPE) has been vital to help reduce the spread of Covid-19 in medical environments.

Lobbying groups for single-use plastic manufacturers have taken the opportunity to push back against single-use plastic bans.<sup>13</sup> However, most people did not need to use single-use plastic PPE in their daily lives because cloth face masks and coverings are also effective in reducing virus transmission and infection when they are of optimal material and construction and fitted correctly.<sup>14</sup> Coffee chains such as Starbucks that had formerly made commitments to sustainability, including promoting reusable cups, banned reusable cups in response to the coronavirus outbreak.<sup>15</sup> Banning reusable cups though failed to account of possible contamination of single-

<sup>13</sup> *Plastic Is the Hero of Coronavirus, Says the Plastics Industry*, 8 June 2020, Bloomberg <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-06-08/is-plastic-the-coronavirus-hero-the-plastics-industry-thinks-so>

<sup>14</sup> *Face masks and coverings for the general public: Behavioural knowledge, effectiveness of cloth coverings and public messaging*, The Royal Society, June 2020 <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/projects/set-c/set-c-facemasks.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> *Coronavirus: Starbucks bans reusable cups to help tackle spread*, 6 March 2020, BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51767092>

use plastic cups.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile some commentators argue that reusable containers are safe to use as long as they are “washed properly”.<sup>17</sup>

Commentators note that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-lasting impact on the fight against pollution, threatening to stall and even reverse progress with the rise in litter, especially of single-use plastic such as bottles and single-use masks.<sup>18</sup> The World Economic Forum (WEF) notes that although the precise extent of the additional plastic waste generated during the pandemic is not yet known, preliminary data shows that in China, daily production of face masks soared to 116 million in February 2020.

The pandemic can in fact be seen as even more reason why there needs to be a move towards greater sustainability and a more circular economy across the globe. As the UN’s Environment Chief, Inger Andersen stated earlier this year: “We are intimately interconnected with nature, whether we like it or not... There are too many pressures at the same time on our natural systems and something has to give.”<sup>19</sup>

## **Circular Economy**

Locally the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (YNY LEP) has developed a strategy and action plan for creating a carbon-neutral circular economy in York and North Yorkshire by 2030<sup>20</sup>. One of its aims is to support innovation in sustainable food packaging, positioning Yorkshire as a leader in sustainable food packaging.

The solution to plastic pollution from a circular economy perspective is to eliminate unnecessary plastics and instead innovate so that plastic is reusable, recyclable or compostable.

## **Climate Change Assessment: North Yorkshire County Council**

In 2019, North Yorkshire County Council passed a motion aspiring to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030, or as near to that date as possible.

A climate change impact assessment form and associated guidance were subsequently developed to be used by staff when making changes to services. The intention is to mitigate negative effects and identify which projects will have positive effects. One of the areas in the impact assessment is to assess the impact that changes to services will have upon minimising waste, including reducing use of single-use plastics.

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<sup>16</sup> *Science Supports the End to the Reusable Coffee Cup Ban*, 29 September 2020, Foodprint, <https://foodprint.org/blog/reusable-coffee-cup-ban/>

<sup>17</sup> *Reusable cups “safe” to use during pandemic, scientists say*, 22 June 2020, Circular <https://foodprint.org/blog/reusable-coffee-cup-ban/>

<sup>18</sup> *Covid-19: Single-use plastic impact ‘will last forever’*, 26 September 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-54265590>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.theweek.in/news/health/2020/03/26/Coronavirus-is-natures-message-to-humankind-says-environment-chief-of-UN.html>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.businessinspiredgrowth.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/v2Creating-a-competitive-carbon-neutral-circular-economy\\_York-North-Yorkshire.pdf](https://www.businessinspiredgrowth.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/v2Creating-a-competitive-carbon-neutral-circular-economy_York-North-Yorkshire.pdf)

## Examples of policy statements and action plans from other local authorities

The task group undertook research to find best practice examples of where local authorities had set out their commitments to reduce their use of single-use plastics and encouraging their local communities to do the same.

These included:

- Devon County Council (policy statement and action plan)<sup>21</sup> – county council
- Durham County Council (action plan)<sup>22</sup> – unitary council
- Dorset Council (policy statement and action plan)<sup>23 24</sup> – unitary council
- Surrey County Council (policy statement and action plan)<sup>25 26</sup> – county council
- Wyre Council (policy statement only)<sup>27</sup> – district council
- Brighton and Hove Council (policy statement only)<sup>28</sup> – unitary council

Action plans included aspects on use of single-use plastics within the local authority – ‘getting our own house in order’ (reducing its use in council offices; working with suppliers) and more externally focused aspects related to raising awareness amongst the public.

Most councils had started with undertaking a survey with key suppliers in order to understand and influence the reduction of single-use plastics and to include in future contract specifications consideration of using alternatives where possible.

Typical actions included:

- Revising existing procurement policy and procedures by for example including in future contract specifications consideration to use alternatives to single-use plastics wherever possible;
- Ensuring where contractually possible no single-use plastic cups, bottles, cutlery etc. are used by contractors at events the council runs;
- Removing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics in council buildings and services such as council catering services (cups, stirrers, straws, cutlery etc.)
- Staff communications - regularly sharing best practice guidance with staff for cascading the message of the importance of reducing single-use plastics;

<sup>21</sup> <https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/documents/s17223/Environmental%20Policy%20-%20New%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Plastics.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s114027/Appendix%20-%20Single%20Use%20Plastic%20Action%20Plan%204th%20October%202019.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <http://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/s17956/Appendix%20-%20The%20Single%20Use%20Plastic%20Policy.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/s17957/Appendix%20-%20The%20Single%20Use%20Policy%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/181801/Single-use-Plastics-Policy-Nov-2018.pdf](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/181801/Single-use-Plastics-Policy-Nov-2018.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/192110/SUP-Strategy-Final-Mar-19.pdf](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/192110/SUP-Strategy-Final-Mar-19.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> [https://www.wyre.gov.uk/info/200305/council\\_and\\_decisions/1320/single\\_use\\_plastic\\_policy](https://www.wyre.gov.uk/info/200305/council_and_decisions/1320/single_use_plastic_policy)

<sup>28</sup> <https://www3.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/brighton-hove.gov.uk/files/single-use-plastic-policy.pdf>

- Embedding the policy driver of single-use plastics reduction into other key council strategies, policies and plans;
- Supporting schools, businesses and members of the public to become single-use plastic free by sharing and demonstrating the council's best practice. The work in schools included: reducing or eliminating single-use plastics in school-catering services; providing educational resources and talks in schools about promoting a circular economy; sustainable waste management practices in relation to single-use plastics and reducing litter. Raising awareness with the public included sharing best practice, marketing/promotional campaigns such as litter picks/beach clean ups and encouraging and supporting the rollout of Deposit Return Schemes.

Durham County Council had adopted a County Durham Single Use Plastics Pledge<sup>29</sup> supported by an action plan to guide this work; and to invite a wide variety of partner organisations from the public, private and community sector to make a similar commitment through adopting the pledge.

Prior to the covid-19 pandemic, Dorset Council had undertaken many actions within its council offices to reduce single-use plastics. The focus is now on working with individual services to reduce single-use plastics in other areas such as schools, highways, leisure services and visitor attractions.

Wyre Council had produced a policy statement but an action plan was not available to share at the time of this report due to delays in the action plan being finalised because of the covid-19 pandemic.

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) recommends that when local authorities develop their own single-use plastics policy and programmes, they should:

- Identify their current use of single-use plastics;
- Identify and develop alternatives to current products (e.g. providing reusable water bottles instead of cups, reusing existing supplies of poly-pockets)
- Implement the changes (e.g. removing single-use plastic products from ordering catalogues, establishing a timeline for the eradication of single-use plastics from the authority);
- Make sure where possible that changes do not negatively impact certain groups (e.g. straws for disabled people that require them), and generally make sure that what you are replacing the plastic with doesn't create other problems.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.durham.gov.uk/singleuseplastics>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/briefings/2019/19-17-single-use-plastics-policy/>

## Evidence hearings

North Yorkshire County Council's Head of Procurement & Contract Management and Head of the Property Service gave evidence to us at one of our meetings about the County Council's current use of single-use plastic and ways to reduce or possibly eliminate its usage of single-use plastics, including ways in which it can influence its supply chain to do the same.

### **Reducing Single Use Plastics in North Yorkshire County Council's (the Council's) Supply Chain**

We were informed at the meeting that the County Council's procurement team has identified almost one-fifth (17%) of contracts where there is higher consumption of single-use plastics, with significant potential for its reduction or elimination. This includes property services, catering, office supplies and furniture, water coolers, removals and storage and some care services. The County Council's spend in 2018/19 was over £430m across more than 5,000 suppliers. The procurement team is of the view that realistically it is not appropriate to seek suppliers to eliminate single-use plastic. Instead, a more pragmatic approach for all suppliers is to have an emphasis on education, collaboration and best practice to reduce single-use plastics wherever possible.

The cost of switching to alternatives for single-use plastics could be prohibitive for some suppliers with some alternative products not yet at a sufficiently advanced and cost effective stage of development and production. A 5% price increase across County Council contracts identified as offering significant potential for plastic reduction or elimination would incur additional expenditure of £8.4m. Rather, positive supply-chain behaviour change should be encouraged rather than mandated.

The procurement team cannot influence change on its own but can provide guidance. Senior Management and the relevant Executive Portfolio Member are the driving force to help in making changes in the directorates.

Measures to reduce rather than to eliminate single-use plastics are the way forward.

The range of measures set out below outline what the Procurement and Contract Management Service can do to reduce single-use plastic usage in the Council's supply chain:

- Reducing single-use plastics in the council as a whole is a much broader piece of work, involving not just each directorate and service area, but also behaviour change at an individual level, and consideration of the policies and practices that can help enable change.
- As part of the UK Government's effort to remove single-use plastics from the majority of its estate, departments and other agencies by 1 January 2020; the Cabinet Office, and specifically the Crown Commercial Service with its links to key suppliers, offered best practice advice to departments, and monitored overall

progress against objectives. Procurement and Contract Management in the Council could adopt a similar role to the Crown Commercial Service, with Corporate Procurement Board, chaired by the Corporate Director Strategic Resources, monitoring overall Council progress.

- Undertake a more detailed and comprehensive supply chain audit to understand the volume and proliferation of single-use plastics among, as a minimum, all first-tier suppliers. This can be used to more accurately identify those key suppliers as well as an effective engagement strategy, to help understand the impact of, and also the ability to influence, the reduction of single-use plastics.
- Procurement legislation is currently subject to national consultation to consider how existing practice can be improved once the transition period with the European Union comes to an end. The Council should be using this opportunity to lobby the Crown Commercial Service to include a prompt for all suppliers in the standard invitation to tender document about how they intend to reduce their usage of single-use plastics.
- The Council can use its influence in the region as the Chair of the Yorkshire and Humber Councils Strategic Procurement Group to consider collective ways of reducing single-use plastic among the supply base, for example across common contracts.
- To include the reduction of single-use plastic as a key theme of each Category Sourcing Plan and the overarching Procurement and Contract Management Strategy.
- To lead by example, demonstrating positive change and quick wins on those contracts which are centrally managed, such as catering and removals, by the Procurement and Contract Management Service.
- The Crown Commercial Service highlight that a strong focus on engagement and ownership at all levels within the organisation is a critical success factor to embed change. Corporate Director ownership and increased visibility of the programme among staff, with regular articles, blogs and updates, can help to embed necessary culture change.
- Increasing the number of 'meet the buyer' events. Suppliers are invited to meet representatives of the Council to facilitate shared learning, promote business, and to understand expectations, in this case regarding single-use plastics. It should be noted that the Council intends to increase the number of meet the buyer events each year as part of its Procurement and Contract Management Strategy.
- To work with Legal Services to understand the scope to amend, or include new standard contractual terms and conditions to embed a commitment to reduce single-use plastics.



- Encouraging greater use of scored tender evaluation questions relating to single-use plastic reduction, particularly across key contracts, to reward those suppliers most proactive and engaged on the issue.

### **County Council premises:**

Reduction of single-use plastics has commenced in relation to its use in county council buildings. This included two years ago introducing recycled plastic cups on the water coolers. Our property services department has worked with the catering supplier to provide recycled cups. There are many parallels with Energy/Carbon Reduction measures in that a lot of the influence came down to changing human behaviour.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most County Council buildings closed down and staff facilities such as the catering service were not available. Consequently, this led to a reduction in single-use plastic in our buildings. However, the council has cancelled out this gain many times over through the purchase of PPE for its staff.

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### **The YNY LEP Circular Economy approach and single-use plastic reduction initiatives in North Yorkshire**

The task group invited Jos Holmes, the YNY LEP's LAs Climate Action Coordinator, to give evidence at the meeting about the LEP's Circular Economy agenda. We also wanted to establish what more the County Council could do to support the LEP in this approach, including working with other public sector organisations, local businesses and residents to encourage a reduction in the use of single-use plastics.

The principle behind the circular economy is that there should be no waste; we should instead design out waste in everything we do be it on a household or commercial basis.

Part of the YNYLEP's circular economy approach is to support innovation in sustainable food packaging, positioning Yorkshire as a leader in sustainable food packaging.

Local examples of the circular economy include 'Circular Malton & Norton'<sup>31</sup>, providing an opportunity to test out circular economy approaches that other market towns could also rollout. Plastic reduction initiatives include sculptured water drinking fountains to refill bottles and refillable water bottles for all schoolchildren in the area. This principle could be rolled out more widely to encourage people to take bottles to fill up at cafes.

Such initiatives could be popular. A national online survey in December 2018 found that over half (52%) of those who drink bottled water outside the home can see

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.businessinspiredgrowth.com/circularmaltonnorton/>

themselves using a re-usable bottle instead and almost half (49%) of those not regularly taking their plastic soft drinks bottles consumed out of the house back home for recycling can see themselves doing this in future.<sup>32</sup>

The YORCUP initiative<sup>33</sup> at York University, created in January 2019, in just seven months saved over 72,300 single-use cups from going to landfill with 3,330 joining the scheme<sup>34</sup>. The semi-disposable cups can be returned to specific outlets to be washed. The cup can then be stored so it is ready for use when the person next wants to buy a hot drink. Companies in York such as John Lewis, McDonalds and Starbucks have also taken part in the scheme. This initiative could be rolled out to catering establishments in our market towns.

The LEP is seeking to have joint collaboration and prioritisation across the nine local authorities in York and North Yorkshire and the two national parks authorities on various community engagement projects to do with promoting carbon reduction. To manage resources effectively this will work best by each local authority and national parks authority taking the lead on at least one campaign. The same campaign can then roll out to all those participating, including potentially to town and parish councils. In a similar vein, a lead local authority could oversee a single-use plastics reduction campaign. Reinventing the wheel would not be necessary as there are plenty of national and global initiatives that could be tapped into and adapted for a local audience. Examples for 2021 on the awarenessdays.com website include Plastic Free July and National Refill Day, asking the UK public to stop plastic pollution by switching from a single-use plastic bottle to a reusable one<sup>35</sup>. Other initiatives include Zero Waste Week 2021. North Yorkshire County Council could take a lead on single-use plastic reduction campaigns helped by its links into schools.

Another collaborative project that the LEP is hoping to undertake is to introduce a staff-training module for all staff across North Yorkshire and York about low carbon – the choices to make in everyday life. Reference to single-use plastic (SUP) would be built into the training.

Local authority procurement across the LEP area and more widely in the Yorkshire and Humber region has a key role to play in influencing businesses to reduce their useage of SUP. Local authorities in the Yorkshire & Humber Region have a combined external spend of some £4.5 billion per annum.<sup>36</sup> The Region has a single strategic procurement strategy, under the leadership of YORprocure, which aims to ensure best practice procurement across the region. Sending a signal to the market through YorTender<sup>37</sup> to say Yorkshire and Humber Local Authorities value low carbon activities and want to have an understanding of where the supply chain comes from, would encourage companies to consider sustainability options. If for

<sup>32</sup><https://wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Plastic%20Packaging%20Understanding%20existing%20behaviours%20attitudes%20and%20openness%20to%20change.pdf>

<sup>33</sup><https://www.york.ac.uk/eatatyork/sustainability/yorcup/>

<sup>34</sup><https://yorkshiretimes.co.uk/article/York-University-YORCUP-Campaign>

<sup>35</sup><https://www.awarenessdays.com/awareness-days-calendar/national-refill-day-2021/>

<sup>36</sup><https://www.yortender.co.uk/>

<sup>37</sup> YORtender, comprising of the local authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber is the procurement portal for the Yorkshire and Humber Region <https://www.yortender.co.uk/>

example companies showed that they are reducing their use of SUP, they need to know they will get some value from that in terms of added ability to tender for contracts.

In terms of supporting the private sector more generally, there are grant schemes to shorten the supply chains around packaging and to utilise waste products.

Business examples of reduction in single-use plastics including the Spark Fund, a North Yorkshire based charity <https://www.spark-fund.co.uk/>

A number of companies in the UK have signed up to WRAP's UK Plastic Pact seeking to transform the UK plastic packaging sector by meeting four world-leading targets by 2025 including amongst others for 100% of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable.<sup>38</sup>

A free app is available to download on i-phones and android phones called 're-fill'; part of a campaign from City to Sea to help people use less plastic. The app connects people to places they can eat, drink and shop without using unnecessary packaging. The app is free to download.<sup>39</sup>

More locally, a selection of Yorkshire-based companies taking action now to reduce single-use plastic include:

- Just Peel, a printing firm based near Goole that has secured funding to launch the 'UK's first' sustainable disposable pint and half pint standardised paper cups for the drinks industry<sup>40</sup>.
- Taylors of Harrogate (producer of the Yorkshire Tea brand) replaced the plastic used to seal its tea bags with a renewable plant-based material.<sup>41</sup> <https://www.yorkshiretea.co.uk/brew-news/our-use-of-plastic>
- Harrogate Spring Water has switched a large share of its bottles to Polyethylene terephthalate plastic, a material which is 100 per cent recyclable.<sup>42</sup> PET plastic bottles also use less energy and produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions in the manufacturing process than the production of drink cans or tetra paks.<sup>43</sup>
- Since 2018 Yorkshire Water in partnership with Refill Yorkshire has been promoting the 'Yorkshire on Tap' campaign to encourage local businesses to

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.wrap.org.uk/content/the-uk-plastics-pact>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.refill.org.uk/>

<sup>40</sup> *Printing firm to launch 'UK's first' sustainable cups with six-figure HSBC funding*, 24 November 2020, Bdaily News [https://bdaily.co.uk/articles/2020/11/24/printing-firm-to-launch-uks-first-sustainable-cups-with-six-figure-hsbc-funding?utm\\_source=bulletin&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=2020-11-25-yorkshire&utm\\_content=readmore](https://bdaily.co.uk/articles/2020/11/24/printing-firm-to-launch-uks-first-sustainable-cups-with-six-figure-hsbc-funding?utm_source=bulletin&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2020-11-25-yorkshire&utm_content=readmore)

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.yorkshiretea.co.uk/brew-news/our-use-of-plastic>

<sup>42</sup> *Fab Harrogate leads way on plastic waste battle*, 24 May 2018, Harrogate Advertiser <https://www.harrogateadvertiser.co.uk/news/fab-harrogate-leads-way-plastic-waste-battle-288485>

<sup>43</sup> <https://nicsnutrition.com/5-tips-to-reduce-single-use-plastic/>

sign up to become free water refill stations to encourage consumers to move away from buying single-use plastics bottles.<sup>44</sup>

Selby High School is a good example of ways to reduce single-use plastic in schools. The school, which has been awarded the North East Eco Champion Mark in recognition of its work to eliminate single-use plastics, gave all students a re-usable water bottle. Previously 114,000 bottles of water and juice were supplied annually at lunchtimes. The school has also got rid of plastic cutlery and plates and all food packaging for sandwiches, wraps etc. is biodegradable.<sup>45</sup>

Plastic Free community-based groups exist in the county in Harrogate, Ripon and Skipton set up to reduce single-use plastic in those areas. They link in with the national campaign of 'Surfers Against Sewage' seeking to get rid of avoidable single-use plastic.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.yorkshirewater.com/news-media/2018/yorkshire-wildlife-trust-refill-2018/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.selby-high.org.uk/News/Selby-High-School-awarded-Eco-Champions-Mark/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.sas.org.uk/plastic-free-communities/>

## Findings and conclusions

Elimination of single-use plastics, although desirable is not realistic at this stage. Single-use plastics contribute to food safety and hygiene, and reduce packaging weight in transit. The COVID-19 pandemic has also served to highlight that it is essential at present for some medical and hygiene purposes.

The pandemic should not be a reason though to row back on commitments to reduce single-use plastics overall. As the World Economic Forum notes “COVID-19 was a known risk that policymakers chose to ignore and the last thing the world needs is to allow other well-known threats to remain unaddressed. The warning bells have been ringing loud and clear for many years when it comes to plastic waste.”<sup>47</sup> The legacy of the pandemic is more not less reason to act in reducing single-use plastics, especially in light of the massive expansion of its use and all the related pollution that that has entailed.

It is easy to see a tension between the immediate crisis of the covid-19 pandemic with all that this has brought in terms of the considerable financial burden placed on North Yorkshire County Council - £82 million and counting<sup>48</sup> - versus making further moves to protect the environment. However, reducing single-use plastics beyond the steps made to date by the County Council is not an issue that we can leave to deal with another day. The financial impacts on the County Council’s budget of the pandemic and the years of austerity that preceded it will be with us for years to come anyway, even though the cost of borrowing is at a record low.

The pandemic in fact highlights why we should not delay, and that the choice should not be economic development versus environmental protection. Instead, if we want our economy to be sustainable in the future, protecting the environment is a fundamental part of that. As the YNY LEP notes, whilst the pandemic has brought hardship it also has brought with it a moment in time where we are empowered to do things differently. ‘Making bold, agile and principled decisions in the short-term, we can bring our economy to life in a way that will underpin longer term growth and position our region to be greener, fairer and stronger – for places, for people, for businesses and for our natural environment.’<sup>49</sup>

It also makes good economic sense because societal changes and attitudes and legislative changes will mean the profits of those parts of the plastic industry producing single-use plastics will fall dramatically if they fail to adapt. Indeed, by 2025, the government wants all plastic packaging placed on the market to be recyclable, reusable or compostable. There are a number of Yorkshire-based companies taking action now to reduce single-use plastic, as referenced earlier in this report.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/plastic-waste-management-covid19-ppe/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/politics/north-yorkshire-county-council-says-covid-pandemic-has-cost-it-ps82m-3054057>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.businessinspiredgrowth.com/vision-and-recovery-narrative/>

Rather than delaying measures until our directorates have worked up detailed action plans, we need to put in place some quick wins and then develop these further. A starting point is for the County Council to produce a policy statement setting out some high level commitments to reduce single-use plastics in its buildings and services. Another quick win is to promote campaigns to reduce single-use plastics. Our role in that regard is to champion action to reduce single-use plastics; if we show leadership, others will come along.

We are not asking for there to be a headlong rush towards reducing single-use plastics in the County Council or amongst its supply chain. There needs to be a speeding up though of the steps that we have made to date and for single-use plastics reduction to be more visible as a policy priority. This approach fits in with the spirit of The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 in calling for all public sector commissioning to factor in economic, social and environmental well-being in connection with public services contracts and related purposes. It also fits with the policy agenda to promote sustainable procurement.<sup>50</sup>

The range of measures set out below highlight some of the actions that the County Council could do in the short term to reduce the use of single-use plastics in its buildings if existing contracts allow.

- A communications programme linked to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in generating single-use plastics waste, to encourage behavioural change amongst staff and the public to reduce their use of single-use plastics in the office and in their home.
- Reduce single-use plastic items in the staff restaurant and kitchen, in the vending machines and at meetings and training events; taking into account though the environmental and financial risks of using alternative materials.
- Explore alternative options to replace the black plastic bin liners used in office rubbish and recycling bins.
- Review the use of cleaning and hygiene products and office equipment (such as envelopes).
- Ensure where contractually possible that contractors at council-run events do not use cups, bottles, plates or cutlery made out of single-use plastics.

A key message to promote in any campaign to staff or to the wider community is that whilst alternative products to single-use plastics might be more environmentally-friendly, they need to be re-used many times in order to get a carbon reduction benefit from using them in place of an equivalent single-use plastics product. Cotton bags and ceramic cups are a greener alternative to single-use plastic but only if they are used hundreds of times in order to outweigh their considerably higher carbon footprint involved in their production. The production of cotton bags is carbon intensive including in terms of washing and dyeing the cotton. Messages to promote are 'reuse, reuse and reuse' - use fewer things, many times, and do not buy new

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<sup>50</sup> Sustainable Procurement is 'a process whereby organisations meet their needs for goods, services, works and utilities in a way that achieves value for money on a whole life basis in terms of generating benefits not only to the organisation, but also to society and the economy, whilst minimising damage to the environment. *HMRC Sustainable Procurement Strategy* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/310632/HMRC\\_Sustainable\\_Procurement\\_Strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/310632/HMRC_Sustainable_Procurement_Strategy.pdf)



ones.<sup>51</sup> Other messages to communicate are the impact that individual action has upon the wider global context. Illustrated examples at the global level could include a polar bear dying due to eating plastic waste; down to the national level of exhausted landfill sites; and then down to the local level of plastic waste on Scarborough's coastline.

As part of a single-use plastics reduction campaign, the County Council could produce a webpage on its website or other suitable platform in the county to give top tips for reducing usage and the types of plastic that can be reused, recycled or composted. Surrey's Environment Partnership single-use plastics webpage is an example of this<sup>52</sup>. The webpage could also explain about the seven plastic codes to make it easier to choose plastics and to know which plastics to recycle.<sup>53</sup>

In our evidence hearings, the County Council's procurement service set out a range of measures to reduce the use of single-use plastics in the Council's supply chain. We support those and recognise that reducing single-use plastics in the council as a whole is a bigger task than just procurement.

To reduce the use of single-use plastics, procurement and commissioning need to work together. Directorates' policies, action plans and practices also need to be reviewed and behavioural change to occur amongst staff and our suppliers. Our approach to reduce single-use plastics should be one of an ongoing review especially as new products come to the market and should take into account whole life product costs<sup>54</sup>. Training for staff will be important in that regard as well. These changes cannot occur overnight but the appointment of a senior officer in the County Council to act as a 'champion' for reducing single-use plastics across the organisation would help drive the agenda forward in that regard.

We understand that alternative options to single-use plastics might be limited and not cost effective at present. However, a starting point would be to update the County Council's Procurement and Management Strategy<sup>55</sup>.

- *Theme 6 – Social Value*, in the main body of the strategy document mentions that the current focuses for the Council include working to increase the numbers of local suppliers, SMEs and those within the voluntary sector, reducing SUP and achieving net carbon zero. This is not evident in the accompanying action plan though beyond a more generally worded action about delivering social value through service design, procurement and contract management opportunities.

<sup>51</sup> <https://qz.com/1585027/when-it-comes-to-climate-change-cotton-totes-might-be-worse-than-plastic/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.surreyep.org.uk/reduce-reuse-recycle/single-use-plastics/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://learn.eartheasy.com/articles/plastics-by-the-numbers/>

<sup>54</sup> The Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply defines whole life costing as taking into account the total cost of a product or service over its lifetime, from concept through to disposal including purchase, hire or lease, maintenance, operation, utilities, training and disposal.

<https://www.cips.org/knowledge/procurement-topics-and-skills/strategy-policy/whole-life-costing/>

<sup>55</sup> North Yorkshire County Council Procurement and Contract Management Strategy 2018-2022 <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fileroot/Business%20and%20economy/Procurement%20and%20contract%20management/Procurement%20and%20Contract%20Management%20Strategy%202018-2022%20New.pdf>

- In signalling a more decisive approach to its suppliers, the County Council could include in the strategy's accompanying action plan, an action to end the use of single-use plastics products by suppliers wherever possible and appropriate to do so. Explicit reference would give clearer direction to our suppliers that suitable alternatives to single-use plastics products will be considered in future as part of the tender requirements when supplier contracts are due for retender.
- An action to include once a more detailed supply chain audit had been undertaken would be to use scored tender evaluation questions relating to single-use plastics reduction, across our contracts with first-tier key suppliers to reward those suppliers most proactive and engaged on the issue.

All of the above relates to 'getting our own house in order' but the Achilles heel in North Yorkshire is that currently there is not a consistent approach across the waste collection authorities as to what materials can be collected for recycling. By 2023, though all local authorities will be legally obliged to recycle a consistent set of core recyclable materials<sup>56</sup>. This will include amongst others plastic bottles, pots, subs and trays.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Environment Bill summer policy statement*, 23 July 2019, DEFRA  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-environment-principles-and-governance-bill-2018/environment-bill-summer-policy-statement-july-2019>

<sup>57</sup> *Councils will be forced to recycle household waste consistently within four years to end chaos*, 23 July 2019, TW News <https://twnews.co.uk/uk-news/councils-will-be-forced-to-recycle-household-waste-consistently-within-four-years-to-end-chaos>

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Recommendations</h2>
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We recommend that:

**In the short-term (the next 12 months), North Yorkshire County Council:**

- 1) Produces a concise policy statement with high-level commitments to reduce single-use plastics in its buildings and in its supplier chain.
- 2) Appoints a senior officer by its Management Board to act as a 'champion' for reducing single-use plastics across the council's directorates and to report at timely intervals to the Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress made across directorates.
- 3) Updates its Procurement and Management Strategy to include an action to end the use of single-use plastics products by suppliers wherever possible and appropriate to do so.
- 4) Leads by example, demonstrating positive change and quick wins on those contracts which are centrally managed, by for example:
  - Reducing single-use plastic items in the staff restaurant and kitchen, in the vending machines and at meetings and training events, taking into account the environmental and financial risks of using alternative materials.
  - Replacing the black plastic bin liners used in office rubbish and recycling bins with a suitable alternative.
  - Reviewing the use of cleaning and hygiene products and office equipment (such as envelopes).
  - Ensuring that contractors at council-run events do not use single-use plastics cups, bottles, plates or cutlery.
- 5) Undertakes a more detailed and comprehensive supply chain audit to understand the volume and proliferation of single-use plastics among, as a minimum, all first-tier suppliers.
- 6) Progresses work to understand the scope to amend, or include new standard contractual terms and conditions to embed a commitment to reduce single-use plastics amongst its suppliers.
- 7) Uses its influence in the region as the Chair of the Yorkshire and Humber Councils Strategic Procurement Group to consider collective ways of reducing single-use plastic among the supply base, for example across common contracts.

- 8) Lobbies the Crown Commercial Service to include a prompt for all suppliers in the standard invitation to tender document, about how they intend to reduce their usage of single-use plastics.
- 9) Takes the lead on behalf of the YNY LEP, in putting in place a communications programme linked to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in generating single-use plastics waste, encouraging behavioural change amongst council staff and the public to reduce their use of single-use plastics in the workplace and in the home. To ensure this is not a one-off short-term campaign:
  - Produce regular articles, blogs and updates;
  - Produce posters for display across all county council buildings; and
  - Produce a webpage on our website or other suitable platform with a North Yorkshire audience to give top tips for reducing usage and the types of plastic that can be reused, recycled or composted.
- 10) Promotes the single-use plastics campaign to schools, providing best practice examples.
- 11) Shares key messages from the communications campaign with our contractors and suppliers to give them notice of our intentions to reduce single-use plastics.
- 12) Shares a copy of this report with North Yorkshire District Councils and the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership to inform and build upon joint initiatives aimed at reducing the use of single-use plastics.

**In the medium term (12 months and beyond), North Yorkshire County Council:**

- 13) Uses scored tender evaluation questions relating to single-use plastic reduction, particularly across key contracts, to reward those suppliers most proactive and engaged on the issue.
- 14) Increases the number of 'meet the buyer' events for suppliers to meet representatives of the Council to facilitate shared learning, promote business, and to understand expectations; in this case regarding single-use plastics.
- 15) Produces and regularly reviews directorate-based action plans to reduce single-use plastics, and updates the progress made
- 16) Educates and trains staff particularly those involved in commissioning to reduce single-use plastics by:
  - Reviewing the supply chain including consumption of goods, services and works, to determine if alternative, more environmentally-friendly products are available that still provide value for money and are fit for purpose.
  - Evaluating whole life product costs.

## Appendices

### **Appendix 1: Wyre Council Single use plastic policy**

#### **Wyre Council commits to:**

- Engage with staff to ensure that single-use plastics are phased out across council locations
- That where possible improved recycling at council facilities be introduced regarding plastics and other materials
- Work with event organisers to reduce single-use plastics and provide improved recycling opportunities at events held on council land
- Use government legislation that regulates against the use of single use plastics to support our efforts
- Work with our supply chain to raise awareness and minimise the use of single-use plastics in service provision and seek sustainable alternatives
- Where single use plastic is unavoidable, encourage the use of recycled plastics and pursue pioneering recycling opportunities
- Encourage strategic partners to adopt single use plastic policies
- Share best practice and information about plastic free initiatives, to residents, businesses, visitors and beyond, through the council's communication channels
- Join forces with external organisations who champion cleaner greener environments
- Communicate the importance of protecting our urban, rural and marine environments, and support and promote positive initiatives, campaigns and actions for reducing plastic waste
- Continue to support communities, beach cleans and litter-pick initiatives to ensure our parks, beaches and open spaces are free from plastic litter.

[https://www.wyre.gov.uk/info/200305/council\\_and\\_decisions/1320/single\\_useplastic\\_policy](https://www.wyre.gov.uk/info/200305/council_and_decisions/1320/single_useplastic_policy)