

WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL SINGLE USE PLASTICS (SUP) POLICY

Executive Summary

Single-use plastics (SUP) can be defined as all products that are made wholly or partly of plastic and are typically intended to be used just once and/or for a short period of time before being disposed of (Source: HM Treasury).

Plastics make a significant contribution to almost every aspect of modern society. However, according to the Press, 79 per cent of plastic waste globally has been disposed of in landfills or the natural environment, since large-scale production of plastics began 60 years ago (source: The Independent, 15 November 2018).

As widespread media reports have shown, this is having a catastrophic effect on our marine species and habitats. Over 150 plastic bottles litter each mile of UK beaches (source: Surfers Against Sewage).

In harmony with rising levels of public interest in plastics, there has been much national and local government recognition of the issues at stake and plans to address them with policy and action plans. At the county level, the Surrey Environment Partnership approved its SUP Strategy and Action Plan in January 2019 and Surrey County Council adopted its own SUP Policy the preceding October.

Woking Borough Council has already taken some proactive steps to address SUP across its operations and estate. The adoption of a formal SUP Policy would tie together the work done so far and give a stronger Council mandate to further work particularly in terms of working with suppliers and contractors through our procurement processes. The Council also has a role as a local influencer with the ability to lead the way and influence others to make positive changes at home and at work. A dedicated policy would also strengthen the platform for local community initiatives seeking to tackle SUP.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That

- (i) the proposal for a Woking Borough Council Single Use Plastic (SUP) Policy be agreed, subject to amendments by the Executive;**
- (ii) the final policy be supported and published on the website;**
- (iii) delegated authority be given to the Green Infrastructure Manager, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, to approve future updates to the Borough Council's SUP Policy;**
- (iv) formal support be given to the Surrey Environment Partnership SUP Strategy and Action Plan; and**
- (v) local initiatives to address SUP reduction in Woking Borough be supported, such as Plastic Free Communities.**

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Reasons for Decision

Reason: To seek support for these policies and initiatives as part of delivery of the Borough's climate change and sustainability strategy – Woking 2050.

The item(s) above will need to be dealt with by way of a recommendation to Council.

Background Papers:

[Woking 2050](#)
[Natural Woking](#)

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Plastics make a significant contribution to almost every aspect of modern society. According to the Press, plastic production has soared twentyfold in the past half-century and, at the current rate, is expected to quadruple by 2050 (source, The Independent, 15 November 2018). However, every year in the UK, roughly 5.5 billion plastic bottles are not recycled - many of which find their way to landfill or the ocean (Greenpeace, February 2019).
- 1.2 Single-use plastics (SUP) can be defined as all products that are made wholly or partly of plastic and are typically intended to be used just once and/or for a short period of time before being disposed of (Source: HM Treasury).
- 1.3 SUP is expensive to produce, uses up valuable natural resources in its production and transportation and creates mountains of waste (source: www.refill.org). According to the latest figures from www.recyclenow.com, here in the UK an estimated 11,000 plastic bottles a minute are either ending up in landfill or as litter, which will too often make its way into waterways and out to sea.
- 1.4 In recent months, there has been increasing media coverage, high levels of public interest and emerging government policy on reducing SUP. The negative environmental effects of plastics, particularly upon marine species and habitats, have recently received high profile coverage in the press and television. The contamination of our seas by plastics was particularly highlighted by the BBC's Blue Planet II documentary series.
- 1.5 There is now a much greater understanding of plastics and its often needless use. It is important to reduce the demand for plastic, the number of plastics in circulation and continue to improve our recycling rates.

2.0 National and local government action

- 2.1 In harmony with levels of public interest in plastics, there has been much national and local government recognition of the issues at stake and plans to address them with policy and action plans.
- 2.2 In January 2018 the Government published its much anticipated 25 Year Environment Plan. The plan seeks zero avoidable plastic waste by 2042.
- 2.3 In August 2018, HM Treasury published a summary of the results to its Call for Evidence '[Tackling the Plastic Problem](#)'. There were 162,000 responses - the largest number received to a Call for Evidence in the Treasury's history. The Call for evidence covered aspects of defining and assessing single-use plastics; production; retail; consumption; and disposal. The evidence gathered will be used to inform policy decisions, for example, using tax to shift demand towards recycled plastic inputs and to encourage greater recycling of waste.
- 2.4 As part of the autumn 2018 Budget statement, the Government announced a new tax on produced or imported plastic packaging that does not include at least 30% recycled content. Budget announcements also saw reforms to the Packaging Producer Responsibility System, this will encourage businesses to ensure that far more packaging can be recycled and to use more recycled plastic in their packaging; £10 million more for plastics R&D and £10 million to pioneer innovative approaches to boosting recycling and reducing litter. Recent examples include the Government setting out its plan to ban the distribution and sale of plastic straws, drinks stirrers and cotton buds – a consultation on which closed in early December 2018.
- 2.5 The Government's [Resources and Waste Strategy](#) was published on 18 December 2018. The Strategy gives a longer term policy direction in line with the 25 year Environment Plan and gives a "blueprint for eliminating avoidable plastic waste over the lifetime of the Plan, doubling resource productivity and eliminating avoidable waste of all kinds by 2050"

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(Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). The Strategy looks to move away from an inefficient linear economy of “take, make, use, throw” to a circular economy which keeps resources in use for as long as possible, gaining maximum use from them. The Strategy covers a number of key areas such as sustainable production; resource recovery and cutting down on food waste. It also dedicates a section on helping consumers take more considered actions. In particular, this chapter looks to incentivise consumers to purchase sustainably; ban plastic products where there is a clear case for it; and encourage appropriate disposal of used products.

3.0 Surrey Environment Partnership

- 3.1 The Surrey Environment Partnership (SEP), formerly known as the Surrey Waste Partnership, established a Single Use Plastics Task Group in July 2018.
- 3.2 The Task Group has agreed some shared strategic objectives for minimising and working towards zero avoidable SUP across all 12 partner authorities in line with national government’s ambition - as set out in its 25 Year Environment Plan and the Waste and Resources Strategy.
- 3.3 Further to the adoption of the strategic objectives, the Task Group drafted a detailed strategy and delivery plan which was approved by the SEP Members Group on 30 January 2019 and is attached at Appendix 2.
- 3.4 The partnership has secured a commitment by partner authorities to reduce the use of and impact caused by SUP across estates and operations. These have been grouped into the following categories:
 - “Get our own house in order” e.g. ending sale and provision of SUP products across councils’ estates.
 - Work with our suppliers and contractors e.g. minimise and eventually eliminate SUP use (where possible) through procurement policy and procedure.
 - Help raise awareness across Surrey e.g. sharing good practice amongst staff; partner authorities; schools etc to encourage SUP free zones.
 - Enable Surrey to take action e.g. help the public to reduce SUP use particularly where local authorities have control or influence.
- 3.5 Woking Borough Council (WBC) is represented on the SUP Task Group by Joint Waste Solutions and has signed up to the objectives at Member and officer level. WBC officers have also been consulted on experiences of setting up Refill Woking in the Town Centre (see section 5 below) and have agreed to provide advice to support a roll out of such schemes across the county.
- 3.6 The Climate Change Working Group endorsed the SEP’s SUP Strategy and Action Plan at its meeting on 14 March 2019.

4.0 Surrey County Council

- 4.1 Surrey County Council adopted its own SUP policy at the end of October 2018.
- 4.2 The simple one-page document sets out its commitment to making Surrey SUP free in line with the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan (although it has urged Government to bring forward its 2042 target year). Significantly, the Policy adoption now gives SCC the influence to require changes from suppliers and contractors and also to be able to influence or challenge any unnecessary plastic purchase internally.

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5.0 Woking Borough Council

5.1 The Council has a role to play as a large organisation itself and leading by example, to encourage residents and businesses to consider how the way we live and work can impact on our environment. In line with the strategic environmental aims of Woking 2050 and Natural Woking, Woking Borough Council has already taken positive steps to reduce the amount of avoidable SUP. Below are some actions taken to date:

- Two new actions were added to Woking 2050 on 19 June 2018 – the Council's climate change and sustainability strategy – to address plastics both across the Council estate and to raise awareness across the Borough.
- The Council has removed plastic water bottles from meetings in the Council Chamber, a reduction which will equate to a saving of some 720 bottles a year. The Council, led by Building Services, is continuing to work through the Council's operations to identify how we can remove as much plastic as possible.
- The Council launched [Refill Woking](#) in Woking Town Centre at the end of September 2018. With the help of Woking Shopping, there are now over 20 participating cafes and restaurants where members of the public can refill their plastic bottles with free tap water.
- The Council has installed two new bottle filling stations in Albion Square (soon to be commissioned) as part of the railway station refurbishments encouraging people to refill their bottles on the move. Officers will be identifying future locations for further bottle filling stations on an ongoing basis.
- To help staff do their bit to improve recycling rates, segregated waste bins were introduced across the Council offices in summer 2018.
- Residents in Woking Borough can recycle plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays by using the kerbside recycling service. Cartons and cups can be recycled at the mini recycling sites located at supermarket car parks in Brookwood, Goldsworth Park, Woking Town Centre and West Byfleet.
- The plastic items we collect for recycling (bottle, pots, tubs and trays) are limited to the 'materials recovery facility' (MRF) separation systems and end market demand. The Council's contractor directly delivers to the only MRF in Surrey.
- As a member of the Surrey Environment Partnership, the Council also supports schemes which reduce waste production, including potentially avoidable single use plastics (now through the SUP Task Group), and working to increase the range of plastics which can be recycled.
- Plastics is an area of concern also shared with local groups. Woking Local Action 21's Steering Group is similarly leading by example, having for some time now consciously avoided the use of plastic or disposable paper cups at its meetings. The group is also developing a new project called Plastic Free Woking (see section 7.2).

6.0 The case for a Woking Borough Council SUP Policy

6.1 A WBC SUP Policy would tie together the work done so far and give a stronger Council mandate to further work particularly, in terms of working with suppliers and contractors through our procurement processes. A dedicated policy would also strengthen the platform for local community initiatives i.e. Plastic Free Communities (see sections 7 and 8). The Council has a role as a local influencer with the ability to lead the way and influence others to positive change. We are already making changes but a formal policy and Council resolution would confirm we are continuing to get our own house in order and are in a better place to influence the actions of others.

6.2 Similar to the SCC policy, it is suggested the policy be no more than a one to two page document which would sit within the strategy framework of Woking 2050 incorporating a SUP definition; outlining the context for adoption and a series of action statements.

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- 6.3 A suggested SUP Policy for Woking Borough Council is attached in Appendix 1. The Climate Change Working Group supported the proposal for the SUP Policy and no amendments were received. Since then, a minor change has been made to make clearer what constitutes the Policy. This is shown in track changes in Appendix 1.
- 6.4 It is recommended that the Green Infrastructure Manager is authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, to approve future updates to the SUP Policy. This will ensure that the Policy can be kept up-to-date, particularly in the light of emerging best practice. Other significant changes would be the subject of a report to the Executive.

7.0 Supporting local community projects

- 7.1 The Executive is also asked to recommend to Council that local initiatives to address SUP reduction in Woking Borough be supported, such as Plastic Free Communities.
- 7.2 Plastic Free Communities is a campaign by Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) to free communities from SUP. The campaign has a number of requirements to fulfil Plastic Free Community status. Spurred by the action of a couple of local individuals who have now teamed up with Woking Local Action 21, there is an appetite to establish Woking as a Plastic Free Community. This fits with our climate change and sustainability work (Woking 2050) and the establishment of Refill Woking in the Town Centre. Their efforts are supported by the former Environment and Sustainability Portfolio Holder and Chair of the Climate Change Working Group - Cllr Hunwicks. Officers are working with them to support their cause and tie in with existing work at the Council and Thamesway Sustainable Communities Ltd.
- 7.3 The campaign's requirements include a Council resolution to become plastic free and to work with a local business with over 100 employees to spread the plastic-free message and make changes in their own premises.
- 7.4 With the support of Woking Local Action 21, plastic free status is likely to become a key theme for the local environmental group in forthcoming meetings and events.
- 7.5 Given its recent activities, the Council is in a good place to support the initiative, but its own SUP Policy would help strengthen this position.

8.0 Implications

Financial

- 8.1 There are no implications associated with this report.

Human Resource/Training and Development

- 8.2 There are no implications associated with this report.

Community Safety

- 8.3 There are no implications associated with this report.

Risk Management

- 8.4 There are no implications associated with this report.

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Sustainability

- 8.5 The report sets the case for a Woking Borough Council SUP Policy which would give a stronger mandate to address avoidable SUP use across the Council estate and operations and in our procurement of goods and services.

Equalities

- 8.6 There are no implications associated with this report.

Safeguarding

- 8.7 There are no implications associated with this report.

9.0 Consultations

- 9.1 The Climate Change Working Group was consulted at its meeting on 14 March 2019. The Council's former Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, who chaired this Group, was also consulted.

REPORT ENDS

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Draft Single Use Plastic Policy – Woking Borough Council

Every year in the UK, roughly 5.5 billion plastic bottles are not recycled - many of which find their way to landfill or the ocean (Greenpeace, February 2019).

In recent months, there has been increasing media coverage, high levels of public interest and emerging government policy on reducing Single Use Plastics (SUP). The negative environmental effects of plastics, particularly upon marine species and habitats, have recently received high profile coverage in the press and television. The contamination of our seas by plastics was particularly highlighted by the BBC's Blue Planet II documentary series.

There is now a much greater understanding of plastics and its often needless use. It is important to reduce the demand for plastic, the number of plastics in circulation and continue to improve our recycling rates.

In January 2018, the Government published its much anticipated 25 Year Environment Plan. The plan seeks zero avoidable plastic waste by 2042. Building on this, in December 2018, the Government published its Resources and Waste Strategy which gives a longer term policy direction to eliminate avoidable plastic waste of **all** kinds by 2050 (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

The Surrey Waste Partnership, which represents all 12 partner local authorities in Surrey, adopted its SUP Strategy in January 2019. Woking Borough Council seeks to build on this commitment through its own SUP Policy below.

What are Single Use Plastics?

Single-use plastics (SUP) can be defined as all products that are made wholly or partly of plastic and are typically intended to be used just once and/or for a short period of time before being disposed of (Source: HM Treasury) .

The Council's commitment to tackling Single Use Plastics

In March 2018, the Council made a pledge to WWF's Earth Hour to work through its operations to identify how we can remove as much plastic as possible.

So far we have:

- Removed plastic water bottles from Council meetings saving approximately 720 bottles a year.
- Launched [Refill Woking](#) in Woking Town Centre at the end of September 2018. With the help of Woking Shopping, there are now over 20 participating cafes and restaurants where members of the public can refill their plastic bottles with free tap water.
- Installed two new bottle filling stations in Albion Square (soon to be commissioned) as part of the railway station refurbishments encouraging people to refill their bottles on the move.
- Introduced segregated waste bins across the Council offices to help staff do their bit to improve recycling rates.
- Continued to provide residents in Woking Borough with a kerbside recycling service to enable them to recycle plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays. Cartons and cups can be recycled at the mini recycling sites located at supermarket car parks in Brookwood, Goldsworth Park, Woking Town Centre and West Byfleet.

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We have built on our WWF pledge and our actions above by adopting a **SUP Policy** which will sit within the strategy framework of [Woking 2050](#) and aims to: **The Policy is to:**

- Continue to identify how we can reduce avoidable SUP across our operations and estate.
- Raise awareness amongst staff and partners about SUP to increase our recycling rates across our own estate.
- Continue to work closely with Surrey Waste Partnership authorities to deliver on joint actions that tackle SUP waste.
- Promote awareness of schemes that enable Borough residents, visitors and local businesses to reduce SUP.
- End the sale and provision of SUP products across the Council estate (e.g. in vending machines and community centres).
- Support local initiatives that strive to address SUP avoidance in Woking Borough.
- Ensure that our procurement policy and procedures require all of our suppliers to reduce and work towards zero avoidable SUP use wherever possible). This may involve assisting in identifying suitable alternative products.
- Ensure our public events seek to reduce and work towards zero avoidable SUP use and provision where possible.
- Share good practice and raise awareness around SUP avoidance and replacements.