



The Plastic Free Birmingham Inquiry



A report from Overview & Scrutiny





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The Plastic Free Birmingham Inquiry

Preface

By Councillor Liz Clements

Chair, Sustainability & Transport Overview & Scrutiny Committee



Recent media coverage of the devastating impact of plastic waste on our planet leaves no room for doubt about the urgent need to eliminate single use plastics (SUPs). Discarded plastic causes environmental pollution on land, in rivers, in the oceans and damages marine and other wildlife and their habitats. At a local level, it often ends up littering the streets of Birmingham.

Solving the wider problem requires a fundamental shift away from waste. We need to manage our resources better while minimizing the environmental impacts of any unavoidable waste. Making the transition from waste to resource is integral to an effective response to the climate emergency.

There are known problem areas which require action at national level. The government's national strategy 'Our Waste, Our Resources: A Strategy for England', published in December 2018, introduces new thinking on tackling avoidable waste, particularly SUPs. It is complemented by various national consultations, including:

- a proposal to extend the single-use plastic bag charge to all retailers and to increase the minimum charge to 10p;
- a proposed plastic packaging tax on the production and import of plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled content; and
- a proposal for a Deposit Return Scheme to reward people for bringing back plastic bottles.

The national strategy contains a commitment to consult on reforming the packaging waste regulations so that producers pay the full costs of managing waste and take greater responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products.

In Birmingham, the Council needs to focus relentlessly on driving up recycling rates across our city to match those of comparable UK cities. The Council must provide clear and consistent information to residents about what can and cannot be recycled, how to separate recyclables correctly and cleanly, and how to minimise plastic and other waste. A high profile communications campaign, along with reliable collections, is the key to improving recycling rates and making recycling part of everyone's daily routine in Birmingham.

During this inquiry, the committee heard powerful evidence from Refill Birmingham, Plastic Free Moseley, the Clean Kilo supermarket and Friends of the Earth Birmingham: local beacons of best practice who already provide residents and businesses with practical alternatives to single use plastics and advice on eliminating plastic waste. The council needs to draw on their expertise, and that of a range of stakeholders, businesses and partners to produce a multi-partner SUPs action plan.

I would like to thank members of the Sustainability & Transport Overview & Scrutiny Committee together with partners and organisations from across the city who have willingly given their time and effort to contribute to this inquiry. Effective implementation of our recommendations will set Birmingham well on the way to becoming a plastic free city.

Councillor Liz Clements



Summary of Recommendations

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	Free Water Fountains/Refill Birmingham Campaign That the feasibility of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) creating a network of free water fountains including looking at the possibility of installing water fountains in Council buildings and (2) raising awareness of the Refill Birmingham Campaign be examined in collaboration with the West Midlands Mayor, Severn Trent Water, Refill and other stakeholders and partners as appropriate. 	Cabinet Member, Street Scene & Parks Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment Leader	Sept 2020
R02	Communication Campaign That the City Council work in collaboration with WRAP to develop a communication campaign which provides clear and consistent information to residents with a view to communicating two clear messages: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The first is about the importance of prevention and the importance of and reasons for not buying and using plastic. (2) The second is about explaining the proper use of the recycling service about what can and what can't be recycled and how to recycle effectively. 	Cabinet Member, Street Scene & Parks Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment Leader	Spring 2020
R03	'On the Go' Recycling That new ways of boosting 'on the go' recycling based on some of the innovative ideas being piloted elsewhere and specifically in the #LeedsByExample model, including the feasibility of piloting the use of Recycle Reward Machines for single-use plastic bottles, be explored.	Cabinet Member, Street Scene & Parks Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment	Sept 2020
R04	Revising City Council Event Organisers Guide That the City Council Event Organisers Guide be revised to reflect the inclusion as a mandatory contractual term in the contract between the event organiser and the City Council of:	Cabinet Member, Street Scene & Parks Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment Leader	Dec 2019 (Revision of Guide) Sept 2020 (Mandatory Contractual Term)



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) A prohibition on the use of single-use plastic where events are being held on Council-owned land.(2) A prohibition on the release of balloons where an event is taking place on Council-owned land for events where more than a de minimis threshold number of people are expected to attend.	Chair of Licensing and Public Protection Committee	
R05	<p>Plastic Free Aisles</p> <p>That:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) letters be sent to all major supermarkets trading in the city encouraging them to introduce plastic free aisles; and(2) ways to disseminate the Surfers Against Sewage Business Toolkit more widely to businesses in the city as an aid to helping businesses start to make changes to reduce their reliance on single-use plastics be explored.	Cabinet Member, Street Scene & Parks	Dec 2019



1 Introduction

1.1 The plastic problem

- 1.1.1 Recent media coverage has made the public increasingly aware of the huge scale of the problem of plastic pollution and the urgent need to act to tackle the escalating issue of the sheer volume of disposable packaging waste.
- 1.1.2 Single-use plastics, often from food and drink packaging, have become a major component of household waste and also a main cause of litter. It has become ever more apparent that plastic bottles and food containers generate significant amounts of plastic waste which remain in the environment in various ways and inadvertently end up damaging the natural world. In relation to plastic bottles alone, approximately 13 billion plastic bottles are used each year in the UK. Only 7.5 billion are recycled. Plastic bottles make up over 60% of household plastic packaging.¹
- 1.1.3 Plastics can take anything between 450-1000 years to biodegrade, depending on the type of plastic, and often end up in our rivers and oceans. They often find their way from the land into our rivers and seas where they break down into microplastics which are easily ingested by fish and marine animals. Many people will have seen the headlines highlighting that if the current trend of marine plastic pollution levels continues then by 2050, the tonnage of plastic in the sea will outweigh fish.

1.2 Legislative background

- 1.2.1 The majority of waste legislation derives from the European Union. The current UK recycling policy is predominantly driven by the EU Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC). This provides the framework under which waste management policy is implemented throughout the EU.
- 1.2.2 The overarching requirement of the EU Waste Framework Directive is that the UK applies the waste management hierarchy. This sets out the order of priority to apply to products and waste and shows that prevention and re-use options should be considered before recycling.² This supports the aim of moving towards a more circular economy and is both a guide to sustainable waste management and a legal requirement of the EU Waste Framework Directive which is enshrined in law in the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011. The Government guidance

¹ RECYcling of Used Plastics Limited, 2017 RECOUP Household Collection Survey

² EU Waste Framework Directive, Article 4

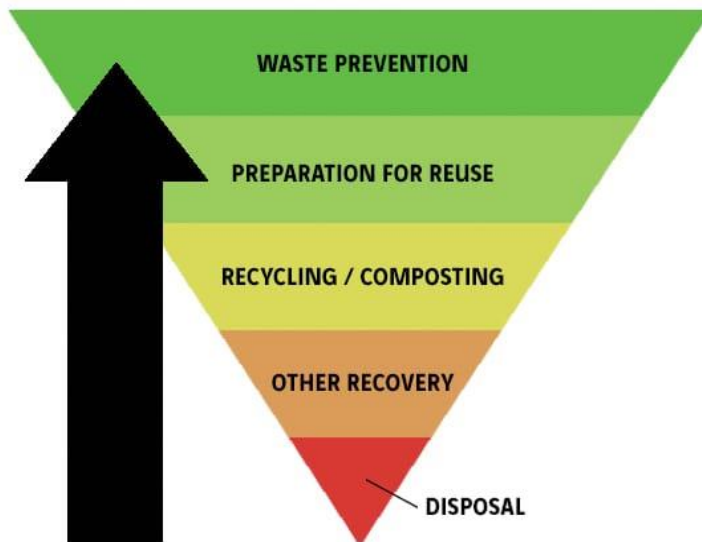


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encourages local authorities to dispose of waste as high up in the hierarchy as is possible in practice. The waste hierarchy is depicted as follows:³

- **Waste prevention** focuses on actions taken before something becomes waste and includes measures such as using less material in design and manufacture, keeping products for longer, re-use and using less hazardous materials.
- **Preparing for re-use** happens at the end of a product's 'first life' and includes any operation by which products or components that are not waste are used again for the same purpose for which they were conceived and would include operations such as checking, cleaning, repairing, refurbishing either whole items or spare parts.
- **Recycling** is any recovery operation by which waste material is reprocessed into products, materials or substances whether for the original or other purposes i.e. turning waste into a new substance or product which would include reprocessing of organic material or composting. The UK is required to recycle at least 50% of household waste (by weight) by 2020.
- **Other recovery** covers methods such as anaerobic digestion, incineration with energy recovery and other methods of producing energy and materials from waste.
- **Disposal** includes landfill and incineration without energy recovery.

WASTE HIERARCHY



³ Defra, [Guidance on applying the Waste Hierarchy](#), June 2011



1.3 Purpose of Inquiry

1.3.1 A Motion was agreed at City Council on 11th September 2018 which resolved as follows:

The Council is alarmed at the growing evidence of the impact of disposable plastic items on the world's oceans, fish supplies and the litter on the streets and in the hedgerows of Birmingham. Council notes and welcomes the success of plastic bag charging policies introduced by national governments. It calls for action at a city level so Birmingham makes a significant contribution to reducing disposal of plastics and cleaning up the environment.

Council calls on the Executive to ask the Transport and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee to explore the opportunities and the options available to the city so it can become a Plastic Free City. The Scrutiny Committee will report back by the end of the 2018/19 Municipal year a range of options, including cost neutral options, which the Executive can implement as soon as possible from the start of the 2019/20 Municipal Year. These options to include:

1. Encouraging the city's institutions, businesses and citizens to adopt measures to minimise the use of single-use plastic products.
2. Immediately starting the process of reducing the sale and provision of single-use plastic products such as bottles, cups, cutlery and drinking straws in Council buildings where it is reasonable to do so.
3. Encouraging market traders to sell re-usable containers and inviting customers to bring their own, with the aim of phasing out single-use plastic containers and cutlery on market stalls.
4. Working with the Council events team and creating a policy in which single-use "disposable" plastic cups are replaced at all large city festivals with re-usable or deposit scheme cups and which the release of balloons on City Council property is not permitted, investigating the possibility of ultimately making these a condition for obtaining a licence for large scale events in the city.
5. Promoting refill schemes with retail businesses and Business Improvement Districts.
6. Investigating the possibility of installing free water fountains in City Council reception areas and elsewhere in our buildings.
7. Further investigating having locally branded water containers for sale.
8. Encourage the city's businesses, organisations and residents to go 'plastic free,' working with best practice partners in the city to explore the creation of a 'plastic free network', that could provide business support, practical guidelines and advice to help local businesses transition from SUPs to sustainable alternatives.
9. Working with tenants in commercial properties owned by Birmingham City Council to encourage the phasing out of disposable plastic cups, bottles, cutlery and straws.
10. Ensuring that sustainability is a key feature of the 2022 Commonwealth Games and commit to working with the LOC and Games partners to minimise the use of single-use plastic items.
11. Ensuring that all Local Authority Maintained Schools are part of a new City Council initiative to help them become plastic-free working with partners such as CityServe and Veolia.
12. Encouraging, enabling and aiding all City Council employees, Councillors, businesses, community groups, and citizens to engage with an annual Plastic Free Challenge Month to be launched in April 2019.
13. Writing to all major supermarkets trading in the city encouraging them to introduce plastic free aisles.
14. Working with Procurement services to encourage all businesses with which the Council has contracts to support the banning of single-use plastics in their place of work and consider the possibility of phasing out of single-use plastics in the awarding of new contracts where this is relevant and proportionate.



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Council further asks the Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs urging him to bring the United Kingdom into line with the European Union's 2030 target for phasing out single-use plastics, rather than the less ambitious target outlined in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan for England only and to fund local government to meet the target. The Council also commits to working with partners within the Combined Authority to develop a complementary regional strategy on this issue to ensure greater collaboration and to leverage more support from Government for innovative schemes to help support the Government's own strategy to reduce plastic pollution.

1.4 Our Approach

- 1.4.1 The inquiry was carried out by the members of the Sustainability & Transport Overview & Scrutiny Committee which is chaired by Cllr Liz Clements and the other members are Cllrs David Barrie, Zaker Choudhry, Kath Hartley, Tim Huxtable, Josh Jones, Chaman Lal and Hendrina Quinnen. Helpful technical advice and assistance was also provided by Cllr Rob Pocock whose support and advice in his capacity as a member of the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management was much valued and appreciated.
- 1.4.2 The scrutiny committee held two evidence gathering sessions on 10th January and 14th February 2019 which included contributions from a range of stakeholders. The list of stakeholders who contributed to the inquiry is included at Appendix 1. An evidence pack of background information was also compiled and used to inform the work of the inquiry. The list of documents included in the evidence pack is included at Appendix 2.
- 1.4.3 The committee has also sought out examples of good practice already happening both in Birmingham or elsewhere in the country. This included a visit by the Chair to the UK's largest (in terms of produce range and floorspace) zero waste supermarket 'The Clean Kilo' Supermarket in Digbeth on 8th January 2019. The committee also sought examples of innovative ways of reducing plastic waste and examples of pilot schemes and ideas happening elsewhere aimed at encouraging more 'on the go' recycling and tackling littering which are based on the latest research into behaviour change.

1.5 Our Aim

- 1.5.1 The scrutiny committee set out to explore the most effective/efficient waste and resources management system to prevent, separate, collect and recycle plastics to increase recycling rates and to consider the particular opportunities and constraints posed by the current waste strategy and prospective future disposal contract. This would include whether the strategic objectives are the right ones and whether the strategy is working operationally on the ground. The committee was asked to report back to City Council with a range of suggested options, including cost neutral options, which the Executive would be able to implement as soon as possible.



- 1.5.2 This inquiry also set out to identify measures that need to be taken at Governmental level and what more needs to be done by the City Council both strategically and at a more local level but also what measures need to be taken by commercial firms, retailers and the hospitality industry and especially by catering and food suppliers. Whilst the Government sets the national policy context as set out in the national Resources and Waste Strategy 'Our Waste, Our Resources: A Strategy for England' (referred to in section 2) we also need to provide a framework which provides incentives and motivation for people and organisations to change their behaviours and to do things differently. We cannot do this on our own and we will need to work with a range of stakeholders and partners across the city and the wider region who can contribute to making Birmingham a more sustainable city.



2 National Policy Context

2.1 Government's 25 Year Environment Plan

2.1.1 In January 2018 the Government published 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment', which stated the Government's ambition to "minimise waste, reuse materials as much as we can and manage materials at the end of their life to minimise the impact on the environment". One of the actions to help to achieve this was "significantly reducing and where possible preventing all kinds of marine plastic pollution – in particular material that came originally from land."⁴

2.1.2 The 25 Year Plan also sets out an ambition to achieve zero avoidable plastic waste by 2042 and sets out a number of actions aimed at improving plastic recycling rates. These include:

- Working with industry to rationalise packaging formats and materials formats to make sure that more plastics can be easily recycled and the quality of collected recycled plastics is improved.
- Reforming the Producer Responsibility Systems, including the packaging waste regulations, to incentivise producers to take more responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products.
- Making it easier for people to recycle by supporting the industry led on-pack recycling labelling system and encouraging all brands and retailers to use this system.
- Continuing to implement the Litter Strategy to reduce plastic litter and littering behaviour.
- WRAP is working with industry and local authorities to ensure that a consistent set of materials is collected by all local authorities.
- Working with waste management industry and re-processors to significantly increase the proportion of plastic packaging that is collected and recycled.⁵

2.1.3 The 25 Year Plan also says that recycling food waste is a key priority with the target being to work towards no food waste entering landfill by 2030.

2.2 'Our Waste, Our Resources: A Strategy for England'

2.2.1 Following on from the 25 Year Plan, the Government published their new Resources and Waste Strategy 'Our Waste, Our Resources: A Strategy for England' in December 2018 (the Strategy).

⁴ HM Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, January 2018, p29

⁵ HM Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, January 2018, p 87-88



The Strategy included new thinking to tackle avoidable waste, particularly plastic waste. The goal is to move to a more 'circular economy' which means that we all need to re-use, repair, refurbish and recycle more existing materials and products so that waste becomes regarded as something that can be turned into a resource. This would maximise the value of resources in order to benefit both the economy and the environment.

- 2.2.2 The Strategy is intended to help to meet the commitment set out in the 25 Year Plan to leave the environment in a better condition for the next generation by prolonging the life of the materials and goods we use, using resources more efficiently and reducing the amount of waste we create and also to supporting commitments in the Industrial and Clean Growth Strategies to double resource productivity and eliminate avoidable waste, both by 2050.
- 2.2.3 The Strategy reiterates and reinforces the commitment to the 'polluter pays' principle and is guided by two overarching objectives:
- To maximise the value of resource use ; and
 - To minimise waste and its impact on the environment.

2.3 Ongoing or emerging Government Consultations

- 2.3.1 The Strategy is supported by a number of ongoing or emerging Government consultations on known problem areas where it is recognised that there is a range of areas and issues which require action to be instigated at a national level.
- 2.3.2 Some consultations have already taken place:-
- Consultation on banning the use of microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products. Consultation ended on 28th February 2017.
 - Tackling the plastic problem – A call for evidence on using the tax system or charges to address single-use plastic waste. Consultation ended on 18th May 2018.
 - Consultation on proposals to ban the distribution and/or sale of plastic straws, plastic stemmed cotton buds and plastic drink stirrers in England. Consultation ended on 3rd December 2018.
 - The success of the introduction of the 5p charge on plastic carrier bags has led to the Government consulting on the proposal to extend the Single-Use Plastic bag charge to all retailers and to increase the minimum charge to 10p. Consultation ended on 22nd February 2019⁶.
- 2.3.3 Current (at time of writing) consultations:-

⁶ Carrier bags <http://consult.defra.gov.uk/environmental-quality/extending-the-single-use-bags-charge/>



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- Views are being requested on a proposed Plastic Packaging Tax proposed to take effect from April 2022 on the production and import of plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled content. Consultation closes on 12th May 2019.
- A consultation on Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for drinks containers (bottles/cans) to reward people for bringing back bottles and reduce litter⁷. Consultation closes on 13th May 2019.
- Consistency in Household and Business Recycling Collections in England where views are being sought on making Local Authorities collect the same kind of materials from household recycling and on improving how businesses recycle in England. Consultation closes on 13th May 2019.

2.3.4 Emerging/Future Consultations:-

- Packaging reform has been identified as an immediate priority. The Strategy contains a commitment to launch a consultation to reform the packaging waste regulations shortly with the intention to legislate by 2021 and to have reforms operational by 2023 and to ensure that the reformed system will match or exceed the revised packaging recycling targets set by the EU for 2025 and 2030.
- The Strategy also includes a commitment to reforming the existing Producer Responsibility systems for packaging to ensure that producers pay the full costs of managing packaging waste by reviewing the existing schemes and developing new ones to incentivise producers to take greater responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products. This will include exploring extending producer responsibility (EPR) requirements to plastic products not currently covered by our existing regimes to create a better market for recycled plastic. The EPR timeline commits to consultations for two new EPR schemes by the end of Parliament in 2022.
- Disposable Coffee Cups – there is a proposal to introduce a 20p charge on disposable cups.

⁷ Deposit Return <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deposit-return-scheme-in-fight-against-plastic>



3 Birmingham Policy Context

3.1 Birmingham Waste Strategy 2017–2040

- 3.1.1 The Council collects around 500,000 tonnes of municipal waste (including 50,000 tonnes of garden waste) from residents and businesses each year. The Birmingham Development Plan, which is the Council's overarching strategy for economic growth, development and infrastructure, contains an expectation that by 2031 Birmingham's population will have increased by 156,000 people. This is expected to add a further 60,000 tonnes of municipal waste based on current trends.
- 3.1.2 In order to increase levels of recycling and reduce waste, eight objectives were developed to underpin the strategy. These were that Birmingham City Council will seek to:
- Reduce the amount of waste that is created, reusing, and recycling what we can and recovering energy from any remaining waste.
 - Recycle 70% of all our household and municipal waste (e.g. from litter bins and street sweepings) by 2040.
 - Reduce the amount of waste generated per person by 10% (compared to a 2014/15 baseline of 345kg per person) by 2025.
 - Eliminate waste sent to landfill by 2040.
 - Manage our waste in a more sustainable way to make a positive contribution to climate change and help reduce carbon emissions. (This will include identifying different ways to collect waste that provide better outcomes in respect of carbon reduction).
 - Develop ways of prioritising the collection of recycling as the composition and type of waste we collect changes over time.
 - Improve our services, reduce costs and use the most appropriate technologies, now and in the future, to manage our waste.
 - Increase the range of materials we (and our partner organisations) collect separately from other waste, for example food waste and/or textiles to achieve our recycling target and to eliminate waste sent to landfill.
- 3.1.3 The City Council is working with Veolia on a new disposal plan to increase recycling across the city which will facilitate the City Council in working together with partners and stakeholders across the city.
- 3.1.4 The City Council is also currently working with WRAP to improve existing recycling services and looking at the business cases for introducing new recycling services e.g. food waste collection and other improvements to household recycling services.



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- 3.1.5 In the wake of the trade union dispute and industrial action during 2017 the City Council instigated an independent review of the operational and business aspects of the Waste Strategy 2017. Subsequently, following further industrial action during 2018, a new Independent Review of Waste Collection and Disposal Services has been agreed to be carried out which will have implications for the waste management service.



4 Recycling Performance in Birmingham

4.1 'Household waste' recycling rates

- 4.1.1 'Waste from households' is the official recycling measure which is used as the basis for reporting at harmonised UK level against the Waste Framework Directive. The 'household waste' measure is broader than 'waste from households' in that it includes all waste and recyclate collected at Household Recycling Centres, litter and refuse and includes waste from street bins, street sweepings, gully emptying, parks and grounds waste, soil and compost like output, separately collected healthcare waste and asbestos and bulky waste collections.
- 4.1.2 There is a wide variation in 'household waste' recycling rates amongst individual local authorities ranging from 14% to 64%. The average figure for England is 43.2% for 2017/18. Birmingham has the lowest household waste recycling rate in the West Midlands region at 21% with Stratford on Avon the highest in the region with a 60% recycling rate. Birmingham City Council and the Council of the Isles of Scilly had the lowest recycling rates in the country. *"Birmingham's recycling was down by 3.7 percentage points in 2017/18 due to a period of industrial action by waste collection services during the summer".*⁸ Most of the materials which could be recycled at the kerbside end up as residual waste and are disposed of either by being incinerated or in landfill.
- 4.1.3 In response to a query about the level of recycling in Birmingham and how it can be improved it was confirmed by the Cabinet Member that the city is currently towards the bottom of the league table of local authorities. Currently the waste collected is made up of significant quantities of food waste (36%), paper and card (15%), garden waste (10%) and plastics (11-12%) within Birmingham's waste stream which demonstrates that there is clearly considerable potential to increase Birmingham's recycling rate.

4.2 Comparison with other Local Authorities

- 4.2.1 Comparisons with other core cities (as far as possible) show that:
- Manchester City Council – The proportion of household waste recycled in 2016/17 was 36% and a provisional figure of 39% indicates an increase of 3 percentage points.⁹
 - Leeds City Council – the amount of waste recycled during 2017/18 was 39.5% (provisional figure pending Environment Agency verification), an improvement on the previous year's result of 38.49% but still significantly below our target of 45%.¹⁰

⁸ Defra Statistics on waste managed by local authorities in England in 2017/18

⁹ Source: Manchester City Council Integrated Annual Report 2017/18

¹⁰ Source: Leeds City Council Best Council Plan 2017/18 Annual Performance Report (September 2018)



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- Bristol City Council – 44.7% of all household waste was sent for re-use, recycling and composting (Dec 2017), up from 31.9% in 2007.¹¹
- Sheffield City Council – Waste and Recycling Performance 2017/18 – percentage recycled and composted: 32.41%.¹²

4.2.2 Comparisons with Neighbouring Authorities where figures are available show that:

- Coventry City Council – in 2017/18, 32.9% of the city's household waste was recycled or composted, up from 29.9% last year.¹³
- Solihull Council – Solihull has a rate of 42% for household waste re-used, recycled or composted which has decreased by 0.4% on last year.¹⁴

4.2.3 There is self-evidently room for considerable improvement in Birmingham and the case for urgent action is clear. As a City Council we need to use our influence to foster positive environmental change in Birmingham wherever and however we can, including through commissioning and procurement. We need to improve our use of resources by reducing our reliance on the use of single-use plastics, clarifying and simplifying household recycling and providing recycling facilities for all residential properties, tackling packaging and cutting down on excessive food waste. At the same time we need to improve how we handle our waste.

4.3 Barriers to recycling

4.3.1 In terms of recycling performance, the household recycling rate typically refers to a supply chain beginning in the home where the waste is collected by the local authority to be sorted in a local materials recovery facility (known as a MRF) which then progresses to the re-processor. There are a number of challenges along the supply chain and a variety of approaches are taken at local level aimed at improving household recycling rates.

4.3.2 The Greater Manchester Waste Development Authority (which from 1st April 2018 transferred all its duties, obligations and statutory powers for waste disposal to, and is now part of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority) produced a strategy which refers to research undertaken by WRAP in 2008 which identified four key residents' barriers to recycling at home:-

- Situation barriers, including inadequate containers, lack of space, unreliable collections, no access to bring sites;

¹¹ Source: State of Bristol Key Facts 2017-19 (April 2018 update)

¹² Source: Sheffield's waste and recycling performance <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/bins-recycling-services/waste-recycling-performance.html>

¹³ Source: Coventry City Council Plan 2017/18 end of year performance report.

¹⁴ Source: Solihull Council 2017/18 Green Prospectus



- Behavioural barriers, including household disorganisation, too busy with other things, no established household routine and forgetting to sort waste or put it out;
- Knowledge barriers, such as not knowing what to put in each container, and understanding the basic mechanics of how the scheme works; and
- Attitude barriers, such as not believing there is an environmental benefit, viewing it as the council's job not theirs and not getting personal reward or recognition for their efforts.

4.3.3 This research was reviewed and updated by M-E-L in 2014 on behalf of WRAP and found that recycling has generally become the 'social norm' since the initial research in 2008, which meant that the emphasis had switched from 'recycle more things more often' to 'effective recycling for quality recycle'. This research highlights the fundamental importance of good communication in ensuring that residents know how and understand what can be recycled in order to drive up recycling rates.



5 What is being done – Current activities

5.1 Working with WRAP

- 5.1.1 The City Council and Veolia are working with WRAP to try to improve existing recycling services and looking at the business case for introducing new recycling services e.g. food waste collection and improvements to household recycling services.
- 5.1.2 WRAP is an independent, not-for-profit company which is registered as a charity¹⁵ which helps people to recycle more and waste less, both at home and at work. WRAP works across the UK with a wide range of partners from major UK businesses, trade bodies and local authorities through to individuals looking for advice and they have in-depth experience of running national recycling campaigns encouraging consumers to take action.
- 5.1.3 WRAP is working with the City Council alongside the contract already in place with Ricardo, which is a waste and environmental consultancy and is benchmarking Birmingham alongside similar authorities geographically, demographically and of a similar size. The aim is to establish where improvements can be made in line with financial and political restrictions and the steer given by the new national waste strategy from DEFRA which will help with setting targets for the city to work to in the future.

5.2 Working with Veolia

- 5.2.1 Since January 1994 the disposal contract for Birmingham's municipal waste has been contracted out to Veolia. This was a 25 year contract which was due to terminate in January 2019. For clarity, the current position is that in July 2018 the contract with Veolia was extended for a further two years from 2019-2021. Subsequently the contract was extended for a further three years from 2021-2024.
- 5.2.2 As previously explained, the City Council has a Waste Strategy and is working with Veolia on a new plan to increase recycling across the city. Members heard evidence from Veolia who explained about work that is happening to reduce plastic waste at a national and at a local level.
- 5.2.3 As part of the work to reduce plastic waste locally, Veolia has been working in collaboration with RECOUP (Recycling Of Used Plastics Limited) which is a registered charity and not-for-profit member based organisation. RECOUP works with other stakeholders to promote, develop, stimulate and increase the levels of plastics recycling in the UK. Together, they have developed their 'Plan for Plastics: The Circular Solution: Plastic Recycling Report 2018' ('Plan for Plastics').

¹⁵ www.wrap.org.uk



The Plan for Plastics sets out a number of fundamental steps which need to happen, most of which need to be addressed at a national level, to boost plastic recycling (See para 5.4).

5.3 Tackling issues locally

- 5.3.1 In evidence, reference was made to several areas which have already been identified as requiring improvement and which are beginning to be addressed in the city.
- 5.3.2 There are five Household Recycling Centre (HRC) sites across the city which are operated by Veolia and which collect up to twenty different recycling streams. They are for domestic waste only and should only be used by Birmingham residents. Work has already started with the City Council on identifying and addressing areas for improvement at some sites in relation to implementing best practice with recycling and HRCs.
- 5.3.3 An enforcement policy is being worked on to tackle the current high rates of kerbside contamination of dry recyclate. The fact that contamination rates are increasing was acknowledged as an issue which needs to be addressed in the evidence from the waste management service. More consistent and better information and communication with residents will be key in starting to tackle high contamination rates and WRAP can help with this through some of their resources such as the 'recycle now' campaign. Residents need to be provided with regular and consistent information to bring about the behaviour change needed to reduce contamination rates and increase recycling rates.
- 5.3.4 As part of the move to provide a more effective refuse collection service in the city in the wake of the considerable disruption caused by the industrial action by waste collection services which took place during 2017/2018, new Waste Reduction and Collection Officer roles were developed within collection teams to focus on driving up recycling rates and reducing contamination levels of dry recyclate across the city and raising awareness among citizens about what they can do to reduce the amount of waste generated. This initiative is still in the process of being implemented and will no doubt be included within the ambit of the new Independent Review of Waste Collection and Disposal Services previously referred to and the effectiveness will need to be evaluated in due course to establish whether or not it can be demonstrated that these roles are having an impact on increasing recycling rates and reducing levels of contamination. The failure to clarify the role or evaluate its effectiveness to date has led to inconsistent practice across depots and has adversely impacted on the systemic failure to improve core recycling services in Birmingham. The available resource should be directed towards face to face engagement with residents and this has not happened to date.
- 5.3.5 There are a number of other factors contributing to Birmingham's low household recycling rate. One is the lack of recycling facilities in many flats and apartment blocks. Improving recycling facilities for all residential properties would undoubtedly improve recycling rates. There is also a high volume of single-use plastics being disposed of through takeaways and restaurants which are not being recycled. The Cabinet Member also confirmed that recycling levels differ across different



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parts of the city with parts of the inner city only recycling at about half the rate compared with recycling rates in other areas of the city. This is a challenge as more residual waste means increased costs to the city in disposal to landfill. There is clearly a need to work with residents to change this.

5.4 Tackling issues nationally

5.4.1 Veolia has simplified its national strategy into a one page document known as 'The 7 wonders of the recycling world' which brings together issues which need to be addressed at a national level and includes a number of key headline issues.

5.4.2 The basic premise is that in order to increase recycling levels and help people to understand what happens to the item they are recycling there needs to be clarity about what the end product and market is for that item. All recyclables are only valuable if there is an end market for them.

Deposit Return Scheme

5.4.3 In line with the guidance in the waste hierarchy, we need to aim to prioritise prevention of waste in the first place. It follows that one of the first steps towards preventing plastic pollution would be to collect more bottles before they are discarded incorrectly. The Plan makes a comparison with countries like Germany, Sweden and Norway where over 90% of bottles are returned through Deposit Return Schemes.¹⁶

5.4.4 The new national waste strategy is supported by a number of consultations, one of which is a consultation on the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers (See para 2.3.3 – consultation closes 13th May 2019) to increase the number of plastic bottles being recycled. At the moment in the UK 59% of bottles are collected for recycling. This would reduce litter, encourage producer responsibility and provide an incentive for consumers to be more environmentally conscious and provide a financial incentive to drive behaviour change. The City Council could also consider what could be done locally as part of its strategy to increase recycling and reduce plastic waste.

Simplifying Recycling

5.4.5 The Plan for Plastics rightly highlights the need for clearer labelling on products as well as the introduction of schemes to encourage more recycling on the move, both of which would undoubtedly remove confusion and inconvenience.

A recognisable label on every recyclable item

5.4.6 The report quite rightly points out that having a recognisable and more precise labelling system on every recyclable item would go a long way towards removing the headache for consumers of

¹⁶ Plan for Plastics page 7



working out whether or not something is recyclable. This was also stressed as an important issue in the evidence the Members heard on behalf of the waste management service in the City Council.

- 5.4.7 The current labelling system is confusing for consumers. Labelling on products needs to be made clearer to make it instantly obvious whether a plastic product is recyclable or not. There is a commitment in the Government's 25 Year Plan aimed at making it easier for people to recycle by supporting the industry led on-pack recycling labelling system and encouraging all brands and retailers to use this system but this clearly needs to be addressed at a national level and should be the subject of lobbying the Government to introduce a standard labelling system for plastics.

Standardisation of Plastic Packaging

- 5.4.8 Standardising materials used when films, pots, tubs and trays are being produced and considering whether policies could be introduced to reward packaging recyclability or penalise businesses which produce unrecyclable products would lead to more sustainable and consistent design and would help to ensure that products can be recycled more easily.

Increase Recycled Content in Packaging

- 5.4.9 Using recyclable content in new products would increase the demand for recycling as well as expand the market for the final material which would help to drive costs down. The research carried out as part of developing the Plan for Plastics also indicated that people are willing to pay more for bottles with recycled content which could provide an incentive for manufacturers who are currently reluctant to pay extra.
- 5.4.10 Research conducted for the report indicated that 83% of people already think that at least half of the material in a bottle is currently recycled content while 55% of people think all or most of the bottle should have recycled content. The report says that in reality most manufacturers use virgin plastic.¹⁷
- 5.4.11 The Government will be stipulating a greater recycled content in plastic bottles (minimum 30% recycled content). The Government is currently consulting (See para 2.3.3 - consultation closes on 12th May 2019) on a proposal to introduce a Plastic Packaging Tax on the production and import of plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled content. Currently plastic bottles have about a 10% recycled content. The proposal is due to come into effect in April 2022, subject to feedback from the consultation.
- 5.4.12 Members were told that Veolia is supportive of this initiative and has a re-processing plant to enable them to undertake this. This would stimulate demand for recycled materials so more will be collected and will also reinforce producer responsibility and encourage investment in domestic infrastructure.

¹⁷ Plan for Plastics page 11



6 What more needs to be done – Waste Prevention

6.1 Prevention of Plastic Waste

- 6.1.1 The waste management hierarchy sets out the order of priority to apply to products and waste and shows that prevention and re-use options should be considered before recycling. In line with the DEFRA guidance on the waste hierarchy, priority therefore needs to be given to preventing plastic waste in the first place.
- 6.1.2 Waste prevention focuses on actions taken before something becomes waste which reduces the quantity of waste produced, the adverse impacts of waste on the environment and human health or the content of harmful substances in materials and products.
- 6.1.3 In terms of waste prevention, the Committee was keen to seek out and highlight examples of good practice and innovative initiatives already happening in Birmingham aimed at reducing the amount of plastic purchased to see what can be learned from them.

6.2 The Clean Kilo Supermarket

- 6.2.1 Plastic is generally found in almost every product sold in supermarkets but The Clean Kilo¹⁸ is a zero waste supermarket in Digbeth which was set up in June 2018 with a view to reducing the need for single-use plastics.
- 6.2.2 Instead of buying food stuffs and cleaning products in single-use packaging, in this supermarket customers bring their own containers to buy a wide range of food, drink, toiletries and cleaning products by weight with no plastic packaging.
- 6.2.3 By sourcing products locally, strong rural/urban links have already been formed with local suppliers and examples were given of items such as rapeseed oil being sourced locally and a local link being forged with a potato supplier which means that the supermarket now stocks crisps for sale which are not in plastic bags. A supplier has also been found who will supply pasta in paper instead of plastic. They are gradually building up the range of products available and the supermarket currently sells approximately 650 products which means that customers can buy most of what they need there with the aim of gradually changing shopping habits.

¹⁸ Clean Kilo <https://www.thecleankilo.co.uk>



6.3 Surfers Against Sewage Business Toolkit

- 6.3.1 The Members also heard evidence about another example of an initiative aimed at helping businesses to take the initial steps towards thinking about where they use plastics and where they could switch to using alternatives with a view to reducing and ultimately eliminating the use of single-use plastic in local businesses.
- 6.3.2 The Surfers Against Sewage Business Toolkit¹⁹ produced by Plastic Free Moseley is a toolkit for businesses which provides information as an aid towards making businesses plastic free. The toolkit is intended for businesses to use to start fighting plastic waste and the pollution it causes by taking steps towards eliminating single-use plastic and committing to alternatives. It sets out five steps to becoming plastic free and encourages local businesses to think about what plastics they are using and where they could switch to alternatives e.g. using paper straws instead of plastic.
- 6.3.3 This could potentially provide a model and a toolkit which could be rolled out wider to help businesses in any community as a first step towards making changes with the aim of over time leading to a groundswell of change in a community as more and more businesses take steps to reduce their reliance on single-use plastics.

6.4 Plastic Free Aisles in Supermarkets

(Motion item 13): Writing to all major supermarkets trading in the city encouraging them to introduce plastic free aisles.

- 6.4.1 One way of encouraging the restriction and reduction of plastics being purchased and so entering the purchasing chain is to encourage supermarkets to introduce plastic free aisles in order to minimise the purchase of plastic.
- 6.4.2 The UK recognises the need to tackle food waste and the national Waste and Resources Strategy includes a number of measures aimed at cutting down on food waste. This includes setting up a pilot scheme to reduce food waste in collaboration with businesses and charities which will launch in 2019 and publishing a new food surplus and waste hierarchy to stop surplus food from becoming waste.
- 6.4.3 Part of reducing consumer and business food waste includes working with industry to determine the most appropriate approaches to labelling because it is recognised that the information and advice on the label has a major influence on consumers. There is also a commitment to review the current recommendation for most pre-packed uncut fresh produce to carry a 'Best Before' date during 2019.

¹⁹ <https://www.sas.org.uk>



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- 6.4.4 The 25 Year Environment Plan sets out a commitment to work with retailers and WRAP to explore introducing plastic-free supermarket aisles in which all the food is sold loose. We understand that the Government has already written to all major supermarket chains on this topic but this initiative could be reinforced and supported in Birmingham by the Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment writing to all major supermarkets trading in the city encouraging them to introduce plastic free aisles as suggested in the motion which went to Council in September 2018. **(Link to R05)**

6.5 Reducing the sale and provision of single-use plastic products in Council Buildings

- 6.5.1 The City Council also has an opportunity to show leadership and to use its influence by taking steps to reduce the sale and provision of as many single-use plastic products as possible within Council Buildings and also, wherever possible, working with and encouraging tenants in Council owned properties, and in areas where the Council can stimulate change, to minimise the use of single-use plastics wherever there are opportunities to do so.

(Motion item 2): Immediately starting the process of reducing the sale and provision of single-use plastic products such as bottles, cups, cutlery and drinking straws in Council buildings where it is reasonable to do so.

- 6.5.2 Members were told in evidence by the Cabinet Member and by Ecobirmingham about measures being implemented in Council buildings to penalise consumers using single-use plastic cups with a view to nudging customers towards changing their mind-set in relation to single-use plastic products such as bottles, cups and cutlery.
- 6.5.3 It was subsequently confirmed by Civic Catering that the cafés at Woodcock Street and Lancaster Circus give customers a 10p discount on their purchase if they bring their own re-usable cup (to reduce the use of plastic cups), or plate (to reduce the use of the orange polystyrene food containers). They also confirmed that a surcharge of 5p is now charged on drinks if a cup is provided.

6.6 Encouraging phasing out of disposable plastic use in Birmingham City Council Properties

(Motion item 9): Working with tenants in commercial properties owned by Birmingham City Council to encourage the phasing out of disposable plastic cups, bottles, cutlery and straws.

- 6.6.1 Birmingham Property Services provided evidence to the scrutiny committee that they would seek to promote the phasing out of disposable plastic cups, bottles, cutlery and straws by corresponding with and working with its commercial tenants. Members were informed that an initial target list had already been drawn up identifying 'first-phase' businesses in the hot food



sector to seek engagement with them as a matter of priority, as those businesses are the most likely to be using predominantly single-use plastic items. A second phase will seek to engage the tenants in the new Wholesale Markets, with further sectors to be targeted over time.

- 6.6.2 Birmingham Property Services also gave an undertaking that they will seek to draft an additional clause(s) for inclusion in future Heads of Terms to be offered to new occupiers of Council owned commercial properties and further explore the opportunity to include a similar provision in new leases and tenancy documents.

6.7 Encouraging phasing out of single-use plastic containers

(Motion item 3): Encouraging market traders to sell re-usable containers and inviting customers to bring their own, with the aim of phasing out single-use plastic containers and cutlery on market stalls.

- 6.7.1 An undertaking was given at the evidence gathering session that the Markets Service will raise this matter with all Market Trader Committees (Rag Market, Open Market and Indoor Market) through their regular liaison meetings with a view to asking them to work with their members to phase out the use of single-use plastic containers and cutlery on market stalls by the end of 2019.
- 6.7.2 The Markets Service will also ask the market traders to reduce their usage of single-use plastic carrier bags by encouraging customers to bring their own shopping bags.
- 6.7.3 An undertaking was also provided to the committee on behalf of Birmingham Property Services to work with partners in the Council's Markets team and with the market traders at Birmingham's new Wholesale Markets to seek to promote the phasing out of the use of single-use plastic containers and cutlery. Birmingham Property Services gave an assurance that initially they would engage in direct correspondence with tenants whilst exploring the opportunity to draft additional clauses for insertion into future lease agreements, committing tenants to engage in reducing the use of such items.
- 6.7.4 There is a much wider issue to be addressed here in relation to encouraging the phasing out of single-use plastic containers where the City Council has less direct influence it can bring to bear. There is a more widespread problem in relation to fast food takeaways and the ubiquitous use of plastic bags and either plastic or polystyrene food containers. This causes a big, uncontrolled flow of plastics into the environment from this source.
- 6.7.5 These fast food takeaways fall into two very different categories, each of which will require a different approach. They can often be small independent businesses operating in local centres or on local shopping parades or alternatively they can often be the large, corporate, often multi-national businesses which operate globally.
- 6.7.6 It is suggested that this is included as a specific agenda item which needs to be addressed and taken forward with appropriate actions as part of the multi-partner action plan to be produced by the Plastic Free Birmingham Summit. **(Link to R06)**



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6.8 Events

(Motion item 4): Working with the Council events team and creating a policy in which single-use 'disposable' plastic cups are replaced at all large city festivals with re-usable or deposit scheme cups and which the release of balloons on City Council property is not permitted, investigating the possibility of ultimately making these a condition for obtaining a licence for large scale events held in the city.

- 6.8.1 The City Council allows organisers of events to use council owned land and when this happens event organisers are provided with the City Council Event Organisers Guide. The latest version was revised in 2017. Section 4.10 of the guide deals with sustainability and makes recommendations for organisers to help them deliver more sustainable and environmentally friendly events.
- 6.8.2 There is an opportunity to revise the Guide to prohibit event organisers using single-use plastics as part of our contractual terms and include a mandatory prohibition on the use of single-use plastics as a requirement where events are being organised using Council owned land. Suitable alternatives for cutlery could include wooden utensils and alternatives to plastic bottles can include cans. Vendors could also be encouraged to offer discounts to people who bring their own reusable cups or bottles.
- 6.8.3 In relation to the release of balloons, although the Events Guide discourages this it does not currently prohibit balloon releases as part of the contract between the event organiser and the Council. This could also be included as a prohibition where an event is taking place on Council owned land for events where more than a de minimis threshold number of people are expected to attend. **(Link to R04)**



7 Strengthening alternatives to plastics

7.1 Reducing use of single-use plastic water bottles

- 7.1.1 A large volume of single-use plastic bottles are used, discarded and end up remaining in the environment each year. Currently approximately 2.5 billion plastic bottles are sent to landfill each year in the UK and approximately 3 billion are incinerated. Preventing plastic bottle waste and encouraging re-use and a culture of using a refillable bottle therefore needs to be a top priority.
- 7.1.2 About half of the plastic bottles used in the UK each year are plastic water bottles. If people used a refillable bottle instead, waste from single-use plastic bottles could be significantly reduced. This presents a major opportunity to considerably reduce our use of single-use plastic water bottles. One way of working towards this is the promotion of refill schemes as an alternative to single-use plastic bottles.
- 7.1.3 Information about a new initiative to reduce their use of single-use plastic bottles was provided by Veolia. All Veolia employees based at their Energy Recovery Facility, Birmingham head office and at their Household Recycling Centres or Transfer Stations at Tyseley, Kings Norton, Perry Barr, Castle Bromwich and Sutton Coldfield will all receive refillable bottles to help reduce the use of single-use plastic bottles water. There will also be water coolers installed for employees across those sites so employees have access to a new source of drinking water.

7.2 Promoting Refill Schemes

(Item 5 in motion): Promoting refill schemes with retail businesses and Business Improvement Districts

- 7.2.1 Evidence was given to the scrutiny committee on behalf of Ecobirmingham²⁰ who have a role as the local champion for the national Refill campaign²¹ which is being launched in Birmingham during 2019 in partnership with Severn Trent Water and Refill Campaign nationally. Known as Refill Birmingham, it is aimed at promoting the use of re-usable water bottles, reducing single-use plastic bottle usage and encouraging drinking of water. It aims to reduce plastic pollution at source by making it easier for people to reuse and refill their re-usable water bottles with free tap water while out and about. As part of their role as local champion, Ecobirmingham are asking Birmingham City Council to support the campaign across the city and to use its influence to help to foster positive environmental change.

²⁰ Ecobirmingham: <http://www.ecobirmingham.com>

²¹ Refill Campaign: <https://refill.org.uk/>



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- 7.2.2 Ecobirmingham are asking that within the Council CAB buildings the use of and re-filling of reusable bottles should be promoted through awareness raising of the Refill Campaign amongst staff and visitors. The Council can support awareness raising of the Refill Birmingham scheme more widely via social media, using and following the tag @refillbrum and @ecobirmingham and hashtags #refillbirmingham #BeatPlasticPollution and #TapWater.
- 7.2.3 Additionally there was an offer by Ecobirmingham to collaborate with the Council to disseminate information about the Refill Campaign more widely with the city's Business Improvement Districts and ensure that the Refill Campaign is aligned to the development of sustainability actions for the 2022 Commonwealth Games. **(Link to R01)**

7.3 Availability of drinking water

- 7.3.1 Currently one of the barriers to achieving a reduction in the use of single-use plastic water bottles is a lack of freely available drinking water in public spaces.
- 7.3.2 In London, the latest stage of the Mayor of London's work to reduce the volume of single-use plastic bottles in the capital was announced in October 2018. Thames Water and the Mayor of London announced a joint venture backed by a £5m fund to boost the number of water fountains and bottle-refill stations in London. Each contributed £2.5 million to a fund which will help to tackle the issues of single-use plastic in the capital by increasing the number of free public fountains in some of the busiest places in London.

Free public water fountains and refill stations

- 7.3.3 As part of this initiative, a network of hundreds of free public water fountains that can refill water bottles as well as be drunk from, will become available across busy areas of London from Spring 2019 to encourage people to refill rather than buy bottled water and limit the use of single-use plastic bottles. They will be installed in shopping centres, museums, business districts, outside busy stations, in large green spaces and in other publicly accessible areas with high footfall. Councils, businesses and local groups will be among those that can bid for the £5m fund and Thames Water will take care of the installation, maintenance, cleaning and repairs to ensure the fountains are clean and safe to use.
- 7.3.4 The water industry already has plans to create a network of refill points and also an app to help people to find the nearest place to refill their bottles with water free of charge²² which raises the possibility as to whether it could be productive to explore whether something similar could be replicated in the West Midlands to support water companies, high street retailers, coffee shops and transport hubs to offer new refill points for people to top-up water bottles for free.

²² DEFRA 25 Year Environment Plan



(Item 6 in motion): Investigating the possibility of installing free water fountains in City Council reception areas and elsewhere in our buildings

- 7.3.5 As part of its aim of promoting knowledge about water refill stations around the city centre and encouraging drinking of water, the Refill Birmingham campaign would also like to see more public water fountains in Birmingham.
- 7.3.6 In their capacity as the local champions for the Refill Birmingham campaign, Ecobirmingham are also asking the Council to investigate the possibility of installing free water fountains in the City Council reception areas and elsewhere in Council buildings.
- 7.3.7 As part of the motion to City Council in September 2018 an investigation into the provision of water fountains was agreed. In his evidence to the inquiry, the Cabinet Member spoke about how this could work in practice and suggested that, for example, some Muslim charities had shown an interest in working with the Council on this and that the Council could further investigate this alongside other opportunities including working with young people in schools. **(Link to R01)**

Locally Branded Water Containers

(Motion item 7): Further investigating having locally branded water containers for sale

- 7.3.8 The possibility of the production of BCC logo water bottles and cups/mugs for employees to purchase in order to promote the use of re-usable containers was briefly discussed with the Cabinet Member. It was considered that for this to be successful would probably require an investigation of whether a sponsor can be found.
- 7.3.9 It is suggested that this possibility is followed up as part of the Plastic Free Birmingham Summit. **(Link to R06)**



8 Better collection of plastic waste

8.1 Collection Systems

- 8.1.1 An important aspect of collecting more for recycling is to provide a regular and reliable waste collection service from homes, businesses, streets, markets and public events which all need to be as consistent as possible with simple recycling instructions for consumers. This will act as a key driver for change in improving recycling rates.
- 8.1.2 The Local Authority, as a waste collector, is required to set up separate collections of waste for paper, plastic, metal and glass where necessary to ensure recovery operations where technically, environmentally and economically practicable and appropriate to meet the necessary quality standards for the relevant recycling sectors. This is intended to ensure an improvement in the quality of recycle material produced by materials recovery facilities (MRFs). MRFs separate and prepare for onward reprocessing recyclable materials collected by the local authority.
- 8.1.3 At the present time, there are technical barriers to recycling some types of plastic items. There are currently a number of plastic items including plastic film, plastic carrier bags, plastic food wrappings such as are found around bread, crisp packets, confectionary wrappings, and black plastic pots, tubs and trays, which are deemed not practicable to recycle by Veolia, the mixed recycling processor for Birmingham City Council.
- 8.1.4 However, technology in this area is improving all the time and we need to make sure that we work with Veolia to ensure that these items can be recycled in Birmingham, as soon as the technology makes this feasible. **(Link to R07)**
- 8.1.5 A suggestion was made during the evidence given by Birmingham Friends of the Earth that the possibility should be explored of whether an additional pod could be provided in the current recycling bin to allow plastics to be separated out.

8.2 Alternative Disposal Options

- 8.2.1 In addition to providing regular, reliable and efficient waste collection systems, in order to succeed in increasing recycling levels it will be necessary to provide more effective alternative and additional collection options to make it easier for consumers to dispose of plastic waste.
- 8.2.2 There are various options which could be pursued such as Deposit Return Schemes and various innovative ways to encourage 'on the go' recycling, some of which were included as part of the evidence to the inquiry.



8.3 Deposit Return Schemes

- 8.3.1 UK consumers get through an estimated 14 billion plastic drinks bottles, 9 billion drinks cans and 5 billion glass bottles a year.²³ The reported recycling rates are significantly lower than many other major developed economies at around 70%. This leaves around 4 billion plastic bottles, 2.7 billion cans and 1.5 billion glass bottles not recycled every year. Single-use drinks containers, or parts of them, regularly feature among the top ten items found on UK beaches.²⁴
- 8.3.2 There are various ways of facilitating and encouraging consumers to recycle plastic bottles instead of disposing of them. One of the suggestions included would be to provide an incentive for consumers by the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for single-use drinks containers. This would reduce litter and encourage producer responsibility, would encourage consumers to be more environmentally conscious and would also provide them with a financial incentive which would help to drive behaviour change.
- 8.3.3 A DRS works whereby consumers are charged a deposit up-front when they buy a drink in a single-use container. This can be redeemed when the empty container is returned. There are a variety of international schemes where consumers can either return containers through a reverse vending machine or manually by returning to the retailer to redeem the deposit.
- 8.3.4 There is a commitment in the new national Waste and Resources Strategy to the introduction of a DRS in England for single-use drinks containers to increase the number of plastic bottles being recycled by 2023, subject to consultation. DEFRA are consulting nationally on a Deposit Return Scheme which would reduce litter, gives consumers a financial incentive to be more environmentally friendly and drives behaviour change.
- 8.3.5 In addition to what is happening nationally, the City Council could look for innovative ways of incentivising consumers to be more environmentally friendly locally, for example using some of the ideas being piloted in Leeds as part of its strategy to increase recycling and reduce plastic waste.
- 8.3.6 In Leeds, the use of 'Recycle Reward Machines' is one of the ideas being trialled as part of the #LeedsbyExample pilot project (see paragraph 8.4 for more detail). There are four machines currently in use as part of this project situated at three locations across the city and over 7,000 items have been collected for recycling. Testing done so far as part of the project is indicating that the quality of the recyclate to date has been found to be generally high. Surveys with the public will be undertaken to seek feedback on the machines and motivations for use.

²³ Voluntary and Economic Incentives Working Group (2018) Voluntary and Economic Incentives Working Group Report 2018

²⁴ Marine Conservation Society (2017) Marine Conservation Society, Great British Beach Clean 2017 Report



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8.4 Boosting 'On the Go' Recycling

- 8.4.1 Moving away from just 'collecting litter' and towards managing litter and street sweepings as a 'resource for recovery and recycling' would present a key opportunity both to collect more plastic bottles and to prevent litter.
- 8.4.2 In the course of the evidence, the issue of separate bins for recycling on the street was raised and it was confirmed that contamination levels are very high as it is very difficult to control what goes into the bins on the street.
- 8.4.3 The point was made that the financial cost of putting the bins in place and educating the public as against the quality of the material that comes out need to be carefully considered. A major pilot project to try out new ideas about how to boost recycling 'on the go' has been taking place in Leeds.

#LeedsByExample

- 8.4.4 This is a unique innovative six month pilot project to boost 'recycling on the go' in Leeds city centre being run by Leeds City Council in partnership with Hubbub Foundation known as #LeedsByExample. The pilot ran between October 2018 – March 2019 and initial results from monitoring to date seem to show that the project is working well with 73% of deposits being good plastic bottles which can be recycled. **(Link to R03)**
- 8.4.5 The #LeedsByExample initiative is backed by a collaboration of businesses who want to explore solutions to the issue of 'on the go' recycling. The initiative is backed by Alupro, Asda, Association of Convenience Stores, Ball Beverage Packaging Europe, British Plastics Federation, Bunzl, Caffè Nero, Coca-Cola GB, Costa, Co-op, Crown Packaging, Danone, Ecosurety, Greggs, Highland Spring, Innocent, Klockner Pentaplast (kp), Lucozade Ribena Suntory, Marks and Spencer, McDonald's, Morrisons, PepsiCo, Pret, Starbucks and Shell.
- 8.4.6 The campaign is delivered by a local collaboration including Leeds City Council, Zero Waste Leeds, Forge Recycling and HW Martin. It is testing a variety of innovative ways to boost recycling 'on the go' and evaluate the results. Some of the ideas being tested include:
- **On-Street Recycling Bins** – 22 simple eye-catching and bold recycling bins have been introduced on the street to test how the public respond to them. The recycling bins have been placed in the highest footfall areas of the city centre. They are for empty plastic and cans and usage and contamination levels are monitored to check for effectiveness. Currently the contamination rate is 27% by volume which suggests that the bins are performing well. The Council has agreed to re-skin 15 general waste bins to increase the network of recycling bins.
 - **Recycle Reward Machines** – There are four machines currently in use at three locations and over 7,000 items have been collected for recycling. The quality of the recyclate is generally high. Surveys with the public will be undertaken to seek feedback on the machines and motivations for use.



- **'Bubble Bins'** – as an addition to the new on street recycling bins two new 'Bubble Bins' have been developed. The bins burp and then blow bubbles when a plastic bottle or can is recycled in them. These bins are being used to engage the public around Leeds at events and high footfall indoor areas and have proved very popular in the city, on social media and with the media.
- As part of the trial the OPRL **'We Recycle' app** is being tested in an 'on the go' environment for the first time. Users scan drinks packaging and the app tells them the closest recycling bin. This is aimed at under 35s, who are the biggest consumers of food and drink on the go. So far usage has been low and market research will be conducted with the target audience to understand the barriers to usage.
- **Cup Recycling** – Cup recycling has been made available in various 'managed spaces' in the city centre. The locations range from retailers like Café Nero, Costa, McDonald's, Pret, Starbucks and Greggs to Council buildings, the universities, shopping centres and various offices.
- **On Street Cup Recycling** – 5 Envirobank bins were installed at the end of November for empty cups and nothing else. They are collected and taken to a facility in Cumbria for recycling. At the time of providing evidence, over 20,000 cups have been collected from 5 bins in 5 weeks. They are particularly effective around the train station. Waste audits of the bins will be undertaken to see whether the addition of cup bins reduces cup/liquid contamination.
- **The use of media and social media** has been an important integral part of the pilot. There has been a media and social media campaign which has reached 1.1 million people on Twitter and 4 million in total to the date the evidence was provided.



9 Behaviour Change – Citizens

9.1 Awareness Raising/Communication Campaign

- 9.1.1 The current system of recycling is confusing for people and leaves many people unsure about what to do and how to recycle. The City Council could do more to provide better information to residents which needs to clearly and consistently communicate two separate messages.
- The first is about the importance of prevention and the importance of and reasons for not buying and using plastic.
 - The second is about explaining the proper use of the recycling service and explaining about what can and what can't be recycled and where things should go.
- 9.1.2 The Council needs to do more to explore ways of reducing consumer confusion and raising consumer awareness by providing clear and up to date information and advice about recycling to residents. There is a lot of misunderstanding about exactly what can be recycled and which bin to use. We need to do more to help people to understand about plastic and about best-practice on recycling in order to bring about changes in consumer behaviour. **(Link to R02)**
- 9.1.3 The need for education and for people to be provided with better information to raise awareness about recycling was acknowledged in evidence given on behalf of the waste management service. Members were told that a high profile information scheme is being developed which will start with the Chelsea Flower Show which will be based around 'Plastic Free' and which will start a Summer of Engagement based around waste prevention and recycling.
- 9.1.4 Members were also told about work currently in progress with the BIDs on cigarette recycling because cigarette butts are plastic. Birmingham City Council is already working with 'Terracycle' on a cigarette waste recycling trial whereby cigarette waste including cigarette butts, cigar butts, cigarette filters, rolling paper, inner foil packaging and outer plastic packaging as well as ash can be processed into reusable materials or composted. None of the waste goes to landfill.
- 9.1.5 During the evidence gathering there was an offer from WRAP to work with the City Council on providing clear information and communicating it effectively to residents. It will be necessary to tailor some communications for harder to reach groups where the first language may not be English. WRAP has a suite of materials that could be used as a basis for communications and has offered to work with BCC on disseminating this information more effectively.
- 9.1.6 The importance of utilising all means available was stressed. Leaflets are especially effective because people keep them and refer to them when needed but we also need to make use of films, online videos, social media and apps, stickers on bins and posters on lamp posts. The question was asked about whether it would be possible to include recycling guides with Council Tax bills. The evidence from the waste management service was that they are beginning to disseminate



information more effectively and to communicate better with citizens and that they are planning a series of videos, leaflets and other ways of providing information about recycling, but it was acknowledged that more needs to be done.

- 9.1.7 The Colmore BID area also identified communications of clear up to date information on recycling as key and are also keen to work with the City Council on communications in their area. This also applies to informing the public better about what happens to single-use plastics once they have been disposed of in the residual bin.

9.2 Good Practice Examples

- 9.2.1 The Chair of the committee highlighted the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority Behavioural Change and Communications Strategy 2017-2022²⁵ which was focussed on how the authority can work with residents better to achieve change. It was noted that Birmingham has a lot of progress to make and that it took Greater Manchester years to increase its recycling levels from 27.45% in 2008/09 to 44.1% in 2015/16. However the city can learn from what works elsewhere and the Manchester example shows that it is possible to improve.
- 9.2.2 More and better communication is a key issue both in tackling high levels of contamination and in increasing rates of household recycling. Householders need to play a key role in improving recycling rates but in order for this to happen, communications will play a vital role. WRAP has in-depth experience of running national recycling campaigns which encourage consumers to take action. Since 2004 WRAP has carried out national communication campaigns such as 'Recycle Now' and 'Love Food Hate Waste' to encourage household recycling and provides guidance and resources which can be used by local authorities to help improve recycling performance through effective communication with residents.
- 9.2.3 Similarly, Hubbub Foundation has also been using the latest behaviour change research thinking to tackle littering behaviours through the Neat Streets Campaign²⁶ which was piloted in Westminster in London in 2015. Neat Streets first launched in 2015 on Villiers Street in central London. Across five months a range of interventions were tested that focused on different types of litter such as cigarette butts, chewing gum and general litter and engaged different audiences regularly including residents and commuters.
- 9.2.4 The second Neat Streets campaign 'Clean Streets Sutton' took place between March – May 2016 in conjunction with Sutton Council. Following the success of the initial campaign, proven methodology and new interventions were used to tackle litter. There was a 22% drop in litter on Sutton High Street overall from middle to end of campaign. Neat Streets Sutton reduced cigarette litter by 30% and chewing gum litter by 68%.

²⁵ gmwda@gmwda.gov.uk

²⁶ <https://www.hubbub.org.uk/neat-streets>



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9.3 Education

Tackling single-use plastic packaging at lunchtime

- 9.3.1 There is a campaign entitled 'Long Live the Lunchbox' the aim of which is to tackle plastic waste by encouraging the UK's cafes and fast-food restaurants to move away from using unsustainable, disposable packaging by allowing customers to use their own reusable lunchbox. 'Long Live the Lunchbox' is part of the Year of Green Action and is the first campaign created and undertaken by Global Action Plan's youth panel; a group of young people aged between 18-25 passionate about living sustainably.²⁷
- 9.3.2 The idea is to encourage young people who might buy salads or ready prepared meals at lunchtime to bring their own lunchbox to the outlet rather than use the plastic packaging which usually comes with pre-prepared meals and salads. The youth panel is using Global Action's Instagram to establish an understanding of the use of single-use plastics in food packaging, especially at lunchtime, and an interactive map will be launched where consumers can locate food outlets and restaurants that encourage patrons to use their own containers.

Working with Schools

- 9.3.3 There is a need for more engagement with schools and colleges to explain about how the circular economy works and where recycling goes. Clearly an education programme will be a key component in bringing about the scale of the changes in behaviour needed. Starting to engage with young people in schools around a campaign such as 'Long Live the Lunchbox', which was created by young people, could be a good starting point.

(Motion item 11): Ensuring that all Local Authority Maintained Schools are part of a new City Council initiative to help them become plastic-free working with partners such as CityServe and Veolia

- 9.3.4 The Waste Prevention Team do visit schools and distribute leaflets to raise awareness. It was suggested during the evidence gathering that it might be a good idea if some of these educational sessions/visits could take place in public places such as community centres or shopping centres.

²⁷ <https://globalactionplan.org.uk/long-live-the-lunchbox>



10 Behaviour Change – Contracts, Partners and Businesses

10.1 Partners and Businesses

- 10.1.1 In addition to the need for behaviour change on the part of individual citizens, achieving the scale of change required will necessitate significant behaviour change by a wide range of stakeholders and partners across the city including the Police, the NHS, Higher Education Institutions and also on the part of the business community.
- 10.1.2 The Plastic Free Summit, hosted by the City Council, to which a wide range of interested partners and stakeholders should be invited, would be an ideal opportunity to bring together a sufficiently wide range of participants with a view to developing a multi-partner Action Plan for the city, as referred to in Recommendation 06. **(Link to R06)**

10.2 Procurement and Commissioning

- 10.2.1 The question was posed about how Birmingham City Council can, through current and future contracts, work towards eliminating the use of single-use plastics within its supply chain. There is undoubtedly a wider opportunity for the City Council to work with contractors and to use its purchasing and contracting leverage to influence contractors and businesses to look at the use of alternatives and to use this to encourage businesses and contractors to reduce the use of single-use plastics in the city.

(Motion item 14): Working with Procurement services to encourage all businesses with which the Council has contracts to support the banning of single-use plastics in their place of work and consider the possibility of phasing out of single-use plastics in the awarding of new contracts where this is relevant and proportionate.

- 10.2.2 The inquiry heard in evidence on behalf of City Council Procurement of proposals to work with contractors to look at any opportunities in contracts to use alternatives and any opportunities to reduce the use of single-use plastics, especially to explore alternatives, for example in areas such as catering contracts and in relation to areas where wrapping is needed in distribution.
- 10.2.3 However, it was noted that Procurement Strategies could utilise the City Council purchasing power to facilitate single-use plastic minimisation by social value environmental weighting in tender evaluations.
- 10.2.4 The Council's Birmingham Business Charter for Social Responsibility (BBC4SR) was updated in December 2018 to include an extra clause in the Ethical Procurement section: "Contractors and



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their supply chains should support the banning of single-use plastics in their place of work and in the goods and services they provide.”



11 Leadership

(Motion item 1): Encouraging the city's institutions, businesses and citizens to adopt measures to minimise the use of single-use plastic products

11.1 Working with stakeholders

11.1.1 Examples were given in evidence from the Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Waste and Recycling about how the City Council is encouraging local organisations to reduce the use of single-use plastics. For example:

- The City Council has worked with local organisations involved in the annual Vasaikhi Mela in Handsworth including the Soho Business Improvement District which supports the Mela to make the event plastic free in 2018.
- Members were told that conversations have also already taken place with the organisers of the Frankfurt Christmas Market about the possibility of the 2019 event being plastic free.
- Walkers Crisps are introducing collection points for plastic crisp packaging across the country and the Cabinet Member has written to the Chief Executive of Walkers Crisps to request that one of these collection points be based in Birmingham.

11.1.2 The City Council is well placed to demonstrate leadership on the issue of single-use plastic and is well positioned to bring together the wide range of potential stakeholders and partners with expertise, resources and willingness to contribute by organising a summit inviting a range of organisations, partners, businesses and other stakeholders with a view to developing a multi-partner Action Plan for the city. The aim would be to encourage the city's institutions, businesses and citizens to adopt measures to minimise the use of single-use plastic products and to start to lead Birmingham on the journey towards minimising the use of single-use plastics in the city and maximising recycling opportunities. **(Link to R06)**

11.1.3 As far as licences are concerned, the committee was told in evidence that environmental concerns cannot be considered when deciding whether to grant or refuse a licence application under the Licensing Act 2003. Only issues that fall within one of the four licensing objectives can result in a condition on a licence, namely:

- The prevention of crime and disorder;
- Public Safety;
- The prevention of public nuisance; and
- The protection of children from harm.



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This means that the Licensing Act cannot be used as a method to control the use of single-use plastic.

11.2 'Plastic Free Network'

(Motion item 8): Encourage the city's businesses, organisations and residents to go 'plastic free', working with best practice partners in the city to explore the creation of a 'plastic free network', that could provide business support, practical guidelines and advice to help local businesses transition from SUPs to sustainable alternatives.

11.2.1 This, together with the part of the motion relating to the Commonwealth Games (Item 10) and the Plastic Free Challenge Month (Item 12), should be taken forward as part of the agenda for the Plastic Free Birmingham Summit. A wide range of organisations should be invited to participate, including businesses, partner organisations, the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, third sector organisations such as WRAP and Ecobirmingham and others who could provide business support and practical guidance and advice to explore the creation of a Plastic Free Network.

11.3 Commonwealth Games

(Motion item 10): Ensuring that sustainability is a key feature of the 2022 Commonwealth Games and commit to working with the LOC and Games partners to minimise the use of single-use plastic items

11.3.1 In its bid for the Games, Birmingham defined a number of Environment and Sustainability related objectives. An active and supportive local group, administered by Climate Action West Midlands, had self-organised to ensure that the Games support and accelerate wider civic sustainability ambitions.

11.3.2 At the time evidence for this inquiry was being taken, the work on the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Environment and Sustainability Options Analysis ('review') was at the planning stage. A two stage 'review' was in the process of being scoped with a view to allowing suitably qualified and experienced suppliers to prepare bids for the work. This would entail an analysis of the Environment and Sustainability approaches taken by the past two Commonwealth Games and relevant other major events, in order to inform Birmingham's options assessment. The second stage would be for an agreed set of options, outline costs and benefits to be developed, in order to inform decisions on the most attractive approaches. The parameters for the review were to include a variety of streams including waste, water, air quality, noise pollution, construction approaches and energy usage/carbon footprint.

11.3.3 Birmingham 2022 is being delivered by a group of 'Games Partners' including Birmingham City Council, Department of Digital, Media and Sport, the Commonwealth Games Federation, Commonwealth Games England and the West Midlands Combined Authority. The Birmingham 2022 Organising Committee is the organisation established to deliver the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and is a Non-Departmental body of DCMS. The Games partners were to be



involved in the review process but the Organising Committee is the contracting authority for the work and would chair the partnership team for the review.

11.4 Plastic Free Challenge Month

(Motion item 12): Encouraging, enabling and aiding all City Council employees, Councillors, businesses, community groups and citizens to engage with an annual Plastic Free Challenge Month to be launched in April 2019.

- 11.4.1 This also needs to be included as an item on the agenda for the Plastic Free Summit with a view to being included as part of the multi-partner Action Plan.



12 Conclusion

- 12.1.1 The way we are living is creating more and more waste and the volume of plastic pollution is causing widespread damage to the environment. This needs to be tackled as a matter of priority. We need urgent and radical action to move away from focusing on waste and towards a focus on resources and to shift towards a more circular economy where resources are kept in use for as long as possible.
- 12.1.2 We need to start by reducing our consumption of single-use plastics but there is a lot of confusion about plastics and about which items can and which cannot be recycled and about the best way to do that. Good communication and community engagement, using as many communication channels as possible will be vital to ensure that residents know how and what can be recycled in order to drive the behavioural change needed. The City Council must to show leadership and work with a range of partners to produce a multi-partner action plan for the city to ensure that we all reduce, reuse, repair and recycle more and make the change that is needed actually happen.

Motion

That the recommendations R01 to R08 be approved, and that the Executive be requested to pursue their implementation.



Appendix 1

Members of the Committee would like to thank all those who gave their time and contributed to this report:

- Ben Lee, Plastic Free Moseley
- Chris Neville, Acting Director, Regulation & Enforcement, Birmingham City Council
- Councillor Majid Mahmood, Birmingham City Council
- Darren Share, Assistant Director, Waste Management, Birmingham City Council
- Diane Mansell, Soho Business Improvement District (BID)
- Haydn Brown, Procurement, Birmingham City Council
- John Newson and Libby Harris, Birmingham Friends of the Earth (BFOE)
- Kathryn James, Assistant Director, Property Services, Birmingham City Council
- Laura Harris, Communications Manager, Veolia
- Martin Curtois, Deputy Director of Public Affairs, Veolia
- Michael Addison, ecobirmingham
- Neil Carney, Programme Director - Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games
- Nigel Price, Four Ashes MRF Manager, Veolia
- Philip Singleton, Project Manager, Colmore Business Improvement District
- Sally Wilson, Local Authority Manager, WRAP
- Toby Terlet, General Manager, Veolia
- Tom Pell and Jeanette Wong, The Clean Kilo Supermarket



Appendix 2 – Submission of Evidence

The following evidence and information was considered as part of the Inquiry and has been used to compile this report:-

Birmingham City Council Cabinet Report – Waste Strategy 2017 – 2040

Veolia UK – Plan for Plastics - The Circular Solution (Plastic Recycling Report 2018)

Veolia UK – Plan for Plastics Infogram

WRAP – Information sheet for Plastic Free Birmingham Inquiry

WRAP – Understanding Plastic Packaging and the language we use to describe it

DEFRA – Our Waste, Our Resources: A Strategy for England

Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority (GMWDA) – Behavioural Change & Communication Strategy 2017-2022

Colmore BID Position – Response to BCC Plastic Free Inquiry

Birmingham Friends of the Earth – Submission – 'Working to make Birmingham a Plastic Free City'

Plastic Free Moseley:

- a) Surfers Against Sewage - Toolkit for Businesses
- b) Surfers Against Sewage – Toolkit for Communities

About ecobirmingham

Soho BID response to BCC Inquiry

Birmingham City Council Procurement – How the City Council can eliminate the use of Single Use Plastics (SUPs) within its supply chain

Birmingham City Council – Place Directorate:

- a) Responses to City Council Motion on Plastics from Place Directorate
- b) Events Guide Extract

Birmingham City Council – Property Services

Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce – Response to Inquiry

Leeds by Example initiative – Leeds City Council and Hubbub

Visit to Clean Kilo Supermarket, Digbeth, Birmingham