

Place-making and Innovation Executive Advisory Board Report

Ward(s) affected: N/A

Report of Director of Strategic Services

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Date: 1 June 2020

## Plastics Free Guildford

### Executive Summary

On 23 July 2019, the Council adopted a motion recognising the damage plastics can cause to the environment and committed the Council to working with our local communities to reduce the impact we have through the use of non-recyclable, single-use plastics so far as it is reasonable to do so. The Council asked that the Place-Making and Innovation Executive Advisory Board (EAB) make recommendations, as appropriate, to the Executive on how to achieve each of the seven commitments set out in the motion.

The purpose of this report is for the EAB to consider the actions taken to date to reduce the use of non-recyclable Single Use Plastic (SUP) and recommend a way forward to undertake further work towards achieving a Plastic Free Guildford and, in doing so, help to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan Priority to protect our environment.

A number of actions have already taken place, which are listed at paragraph 3.8.

There are a number of differing approaches adopted by Councils to commit to reducing plastics. All twelve Surrey local authorities formed a SUP Task Group, including officers from Guildford, and developed a strategy and five-year action plan of good practice activities for each authority to use and adapt to help meet their own goals and targets to reduce SUPs.

For the EAB to present robust and reliable recommendations to the Executive on the further actions this Council can take to achieve its seven commitments, officers recommend using the Surrey action plan as a framework to formulate a new Guildford SUP Action Plan. The benefit of this approach is that it embraces good practice activities that all twelve Surrey authorities have agreed to work towards collaboratively and independently.

### Recommendation to the Executive Advisory Board

That the EAB considers the actions taken so far by the Council to address the July 2019 commitments to reduce the impact that the use of non-recyclable, single-use plastics have on

the environment and to recommend the formulation of a new Guildford SUP Action Plan for the Executive to approve.

**Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication? No**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 For the EAB to consider the actions taken to date to reduce the use of non-recyclable Single Use Plastic<sup>1</sup> (SUP) and recommend a way forward for the Council to undertake further work towards a Plastic Free Guildford and in doing so, help to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan Priority to protect our environment.

## **2. Strategic Priorities**

- 2.1 Eliminating avoidable SUP will help reduce the ever-increasing volume being discarded as a waste product and the impact this has on the wider environment.
- 2.2 Working towards a Plastics Free Guildford will help deliver our Council's fundamental theme to support the community and protect our environment. By making improvements to reduce the amount of SUP used at our sites, influencing others to do the same, including suppliers, contractors, businesses and residents, we can reduce the volume of SUP waste discarded into the environment.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 At its meeting of 23 July 2019, the Council resolved:

That it recognises the damage plastics can cause to the environment and commits to work with our local communities to reduce the impact we have through our use of non-recyclable, single-use plastics so far as it is reasonable to do so.

This Council also agreed with the general principles of the national 'Plastic Free Communities' scheme and committed to supporting, promoting and encouraging plastic free initiatives and events within the borough.

By continuing to play our part in delivering the Surrey Environment Partnership's SUP Strategy (2018) and 5-year action plan, we also committed to:

- a) Avoiding the use of single-use plastics ourselves where there are suitable alternatives
- b) Encouraging local businesses to do the same
- c) Engaging with and supporting the Plastic Free Guildford campaign

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<sup>1</sup> SUP can be summarised as disposable plastics comprising in the main, packaging that is only used once before being thrown away. It also includes those more familiar items such as bottles, straws, containers, cups, cutlery and grocery bags.

- d) Working with our suppliers to discourage the use of avoidable single-use plastics
- e) Supporting our communities in their efforts to reduce the use of single-use plastics
- f) Supporting the national water refill campaign which promotes the provision of facilities to enable people to refill reusable drinking water bottles
- g) Working with our partners to investigate how we can provide effective and sustainable incentives for the return of single-use plastics for recycling.

The Council asked that the Place-Making and Innovation EAB make recommendations, as appropriate, to the Executive on how to achieve each of the seven points (a) to (g) above, following detailed discussion.

- 3.2 This report provides an update on actions taken to date and proposes a way forward on how to take further actions to achieve the seven commitments.

### **National context**

- 3.3 At national level, the Government published a 25-Year Environment Plan in January 2018, which included a target of “achieving zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042”. Also, DEFRA’s Waste and Resources Strategy 2018/19 set out a number of reforms for the Government to achieve a greener future, including one to remove SUP from the Government estate by 2020.

- 3.4 In line with national policy, many local authorities view reducing SUP as a priority for their own area. Working collaboratively, the twelve authorities in Surrey decided to act together as partners to formulate a strategy at regional level to raise awareness across the county whilst acting locally.

### **SUPs Strategy for Surrey**

- 3.5 A SUP Task Group with representatives from the twelve authorities, including Guildford, with support from the Surrey Environment Partnership (SEP, formerly Surrey Waste Partnership), established a common vision of “supporting Surrey to become a SUP free county”. The Group developed a strategy and five-year action plan of good practice activities for each authority to use and adapt to help meet their own goals and targets. The SUPs Strategy for Surrey is provided at **Appendix 1**.

- 3.6 Four themes emerged from the Strategy, each of which contains a number of objectives, suggested actions and target dates for completion. The themes are:

- 1) Getting our house in order
- 2) Working with Suppliers and Contractors
- 3) Raising awareness across Surrey
- 4) Supporting Surrey to take action

## **Our commitments so far**

- 3.7 Council officers have continued to participate in the delivery of SEP's SUPs Strategy for Surrey, attending regular SUP Task Group meetings at which officers hear about the progress other councils are making and feedback on actions taken.
- 3.8 Officers have also addressed a number of the Council's seven commitments (a) to (g) listed at paragraph 3.1:
- a) Avoiding the use of single-use plastics ourselves where there are suitable alternatives:
    - Stopped supplying plastic straws in Millmead restaurant
    - Stopped using SUP cups for meeting room refreshments; if plastic cups are used these are formed from recyclable plastic
    - Changed to purchasing cleaning liquid products at Millmead in large containers and decanting to smaller ones for the cleaning staff to use
    - Changed to purchasing lower plastic content sacks used at Depot and Stoke Park Nursery
  - b) Encouraging local businesses to do the same:
    - Engaged with businesses locally advising them on better options to avoid SUPs including alternatives to plastic cups, for example educating on compostable ones being worse rather than a better option
  - d) Working with our suppliers to discourage the use of avoidable single-use plastics:
    - Council's Millmead restaurant caterer changed all takeaway packaging to be recyclable materials only
  - e) Supporting our communities in their efforts to reduce the use of single-use plastics
    - With Experience Guildford, undertook a litter picking exercise to pick up plastic around the town centre
    - Undertaken schools and community engagement work providing recycling talks to all c.900 school children that go to Junior Citizens on reducing waste and recycling and school assemblies on the same
    - Similarly, community group engagement on the same subjects at WI meetings, scout groups, community interest groups and provided articles to community newsletters when requested
  - f) Supporting the national water refill campaign which promotes the provision of facilities to enable people to refill reusable drinking water bottles
    - Committed funds jointly with SEP to install a water bottle refilling station on Ward Street in Guildford town centre, which commits 13 pence every

- time it is used to help fund further environmental projects as part of a Refill App network
- Stopped supplying water refilling stations with SUP cups to encourage staff to use their own glass or cup to refill when needed
- g) Working with our partners to investigate how we can provide effective and sustainable incentives for the return of single-use plastics for recycling.
- Supported staff to recycle more by providing recycling bins in prominent locations including office areas, kitchenettes and Millmead restaurant

### Next steps

- 3.9 Within Surrey there has been a mixed approach by authorities to dealing with SUPs. Some have produced their own SUP policy; others have endorsed the SUPs Strategy for Surrey and produced their own pledges and/or action plans and others have provided public information or guidance on their websites. Examples of these are provided at **Appendix 2**.
- 3.10 At Guildford, we stated our pledge of where we want to be, that is, to achieve seven commitments, (a) to (g). Whilst officers have acted on most of these with quick win or straightforward actions, other commitments have presented limitations in terms of how effective officers can be in their implementation.
- 3.11 For example, our commitment to encourage local businesses to avoid the use of SUPs where there are suitable alternatives, engaging with and supporting the Plastic Free Guildford campaign, and supporting our communities in their efforts to reduce the use of single-use plastics all present challenges for the Council to fully embrace these commitments. Each requires a dedicated resource both in terms of staffing and time to set these up and running. However, there are opportunities that can involve less resource intensive activities such as informative publicity or guidance notes as some other authorities have done, or providing financial support in the form of grant, subject to approval.
- 3.12 As there are currently no government guidelines, indicators or metrics determining what reduction of plastic waste is expected from local government, there is a benefit to our Council using the Surrey SUP Action Plan to provide a framework of good practice activities, which all twelve authorities have already agreed to work towards collaboratively and independently.
- 3.13 To formulate a plan of action for the Executive to consider, officers propose that future direction takes the form of a **new Guildford SUP Action Plan** based on the one set out in the SUPs Strategy for Surrey (referred to in paragraph 3.5).
- 3.14 This will allow the EAB to advise the Executive using an action plan formulated on best guidance based on officers' collective understanding of the impact of SUP waste on the environment and what actions local authorities can take both locally and collaboratively to make a difference.

## Example activities for Guildford SUP Action Plan

3.15 We can use the Surrey SUP Action Plan four themes outlined in paragraph 3.6 to plan a way forward, and officers across the Council are already exploring ways to achieve some of the objectives listed under these themes, for example:

- Theme 1 Getting our house in order; we can add to what has already been achieved including, for example, working towards zero unsustainable plastics in the Millmead restaurant; we can look at how SUPs are managed at other Council sites, not just Millmead, and undertake a plastic waste audit. We can also examine the possibility to centralise contracts for supplies, such as stationery to reduce waste plastic products.
- Theme 2 Working with Suppliers and Contractors and actions around procurement and contracts for suppliers to reduce and work towards zero avoidable SUP use; we have changes to the Procurement Procedure Rules due in September 2020 that will provide an opportunity to add requirements to our procurement policy and formalise SUP requirements for tenderers and the tender process.
- We are looking to introduce and extend clauses in contracts with suppliers, contractors and leases that include requirements to be met on climate change objectives, and we can explore whether to centralise contracts to improve control on use of recyclable or reusable plastics.
- Theme 3 Raise Awareness across Surrey; guides Surrey local authorities on good practice, achievable actions. These can be used to formulate a plan for communicating the Guildford message across the Borough and help address the Council's commitment to local businesses and communities in so far as is reasonable.
- With the SEP, we jointly deliver communication campaigns where we focus on plastics reduction and recycling. These already have a far reach as it is an all-county campaign advertising on bus stops, radio, tv, bus backs, display boards and so on, and we could look to see if we can use this to further our campaign.
- Theme 4 Supporting Surrey to Take Action; Surrey County Council as Waste Disposal Authority now own the disposal contracts for the recycling. We could investigate further whether they can include in their procurement process, the requirement to accept the full range of plastics for all councils, like ours. Other councils have in the past focused more on cost which meant a more limited range of plastics is accepted and not recycled well enough to be used efficiently again.

3.16 Coordinating all the different strands of activities in the form of a new Guildford SUP Action Plan is achievable with the help of a small number of officers from teams across the Council. Officers propose this should be coordinated by the Climate Change Officer.

#### **4. Consultations**

- 4.1 Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability has been consulted and agrees with the recommendations of this report. The Chair for this EAB, Councillor Gunning, and Cllr Potter have also been consulted.

#### **5. Key Risks**

- 5.1 The opportunity exists to springboard off the work already undertaken by the SUP partners and twelve Surrey authorities and use their generic action plan to guide a new Guildford SUP Action Plan.
- 5.2 There is a risk that the Council could overcommit resources to achieve the commitments set out in July 2019. Through careful consideration of what measures and actions are reasonable and most effective for the Council to take recognising officer commitments and resources, a team of relevant officers will be best placed to manage this risk.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 No immediate financial implications whilst we agree an action plan. A budget was approved in February as part of the 2020/21 budget cycle. Once an action plan is in place, the budgets will be allocated accordingly.

#### **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 Currently there is no legislation to review how waste is measured or for using weight data as a basis from making policy . However, officers are aware that this could potentially be introduced in future legislation and may require us to develop new indicators and metrics to better measure waste, including plastics.
- 7.2 The Legal team is examining the possibility to introduce clauses to legal agreements and contracts on addressing climate change including any legal precedents, best practice and examples from other authorities. Otherwise no other legal implications apply.
- 7.3 The Procurement Team will be considering changes to requirements for tenderers and tender procedures and will reflect on what Council Procurement Procedure Rules could be apply.

#### **8. Human Resource Implications**

- 8.1 Officers with responsibility to produce a new Guildford SUP Action Plan and take forward the actions required to meet our stated commitments, will be resourced from existing teams. These officers will be responsible for ensuring proposed actions are realistic and do not result in overcommitting time and resource where there could be a consequential impact on services.

- 8.2 The Asset Management team has authority to recruit a Climate Change Officer who will assist in the planning and running of this work stream.

## **9. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 9.1 This duty has been considered in the context of this report and it has been concluded that there are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from this report.

## **10. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications**

- 10.1 This Council declared a climate emergency and passed a motion confirming its commitment to reducing SUPs on 23 July 2019, recognising the damage plastics can cause to the environment and thereby committing to reduce the impact of the use of single-use plastics so far as it is reasonable to do. The recommendations of this report contribute to the reduction of risk arising from SUPs discarded into the wider environment which pose a threat to the ecosystem as they degrade into smaller particles. The recommended actions will help towards tackling the problem across the borough and county.

## **11. Summary of Options**

- 11.1 There are a number of differing approaches adopted by Councils to commit to reducing plastics. For the EAB to be able to present robust and reliable recommendations to the Executive on how to achieve each of its seven commitments, officers recommend the Council use the Surrey SUP Action Plan to formulate and develop its own, relevant key actions for our Council in the form of a new Guildford SUP Action Plan.
- 11.2 Committing to extensive actions that are beyond the limits of what our resources will allow, is a risk and expectations of what can reasonably be provided must be considered for all actions committed to in a Guildford SUP Action Plan.

## **12. Conclusion**

- 12.1 Addressing the Council's pledge towards a Plastic Free Guildford last July required this EAB to make recommendations, as appropriate, to the Executive on how to achieve each of the seven commitments set out by the Council, following detailed discussion.
- 12.2 Council officers have already undertaken improvements and actions. However, there is more that can be done, and this report suggests a way forward to formulate a new SUP action plan for Guildford. Using the guidance gained as a member of the Surrey SUP Task Group will enable officers to formulate a plan that is relevant, robust and achievable.
- 12.3 A Guildford SUP Action Plan will also enable this EAB to make structured and planned recommendations to the Executive on how to further achieve the seven commitments.

12.4 Officers propose this EAB recognises the work that has already taken place and endorses the recommendation to produce a Guildford SUP Action Plan. Once drafted, the Action Plan will be referred back to the EAB for consideration and submission to the Executive for formal approval.

**13. Background Papers**

13.1 None

**14. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – A Single-use Plastics Strategy for Surrey

Appendix 2 – Examples of Council Approaches to Plastics

Please ensure the following service areas have signed off your report. Please complete this box and do not delete.

<b>Service</b>	<b>Sign off date</b>
<i>Finance / S.151 Officer</i>	<i>17/04/2020</i>
<i>Legal / Governance</i>	<i>28/04/2020</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>23/04/2020</i>
<i>Equalities</i>	<i>23/04/2020</i>
<i>Lead Councillor</i>	<i>28/04/2020</i>
<i>CMT</i>	<i>21/04/2020</i>
<i>Committee Services</i>	<i>28/04/2020</i>