

Council – 17 September 2018

Notice of motion – Reducing Plastic Waste

A notice of motion has been received from Councillors S. Coughlan, D. Coughlan, Shires, Ward, Hussain, Jeavons, Jukes, Robertson, Chambers, Underhill and Nawaz:

This Council notes with concern:

- *That 300 million tons of new plastic is made each year, half of which is for single use plastic such as packaging and convenience foods. In many cases, such as plastic straws, takeaway food containers and coffee cups, there are practical alternatives available that are either reusable or sustainable.*
- *That in 2016, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation estimated that by weight, there could be more plastic in our oceans than fish, as soon as 2050. As plastics are durable and strong they will stay in our environment for up to an estimated 600 years. (Columbia University)*
- *That marine plastic leads to coastal/offshore dead zones, entanglement, death through ingestion, toxic transfer and, once degraded into micro plastics, contamination of the food chain – including our own. We are quite literally eating the plastic that has ended up in our seas.*

Council welcomes:

- *The significant increase in recycling achieved in the Borough in the last decade, through improvements to doorstep recycling.*
- *Policy adopted in 2017 in support of Deposit Return Schemes, and the significant reduction in plastic waste that such schemes could achieve.*
- *The success of the “Plastic Bag Levy”.*

This Council therefore commits that Walsall will play its full role in helping to reduce plastic waste, specifically:

- *That the Council will undertake an audit, within existing resources, of single use plastics used by the authority, seek to replace with sustainable or reusable alternatives where practicable.*
- *That the Council will play its role in helping to educate members of the public about plastic waste, specifically by including information for members of the public on reducing plastic waste in both online and written materials.*
- *That the Council will use its membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority to work towards increasing the amount of plastic product that can be recycled through doorstep and other recycling.*
- *To write to our members of Parliament and the European Parliament, and to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, urging them to consider legislation and regulations which will reduce the amount of single use plastic used by society.*
- *To use the links we have with businesses in Walsall to encourage them to reduce the amount of plastic waste produced and specifically to write to each of our major supermarkets asking them to consider introducing a “plastic free aisle” in their Walsall store(s) on a trial basis.*

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Reducing all types of waste should be a priority both environmentally and financially and plastics are a particular concern due to the large volumes of potentially avoidable waste produced and the acknowledged affects they are having on our natural environment. The vast majority of the 300 million tonnes of plastics produced globally each year remain unrecyclable. At least two-thirds of plastic packaging in the UK is not, or cannot be, recycled.
- 1.2 In 2017/18 Walsall disposed of circa 120,000 tonnes of waste at a cost of £5.1million. Our primary route for disposing of plastics, such as plastic bottles, is via the co-mingled dry recycling contract. Last year we sent circa 22,600 tonnes of co-mingled materials to be recycled of which plastics made up 10% or 2,260 tonnes.
- 1.3 Not all items containing plastic can be recycled, for example disposable coffee cups, crisp packets or polystyrene trays are usually landfilled or incinerated. More sustainable alternatives are often available for these products and retailers should be positively encouraged to use these alternatives and make them available to consumers.
- 1.4 If Council were minded to support the notice of motion, consideration of how services could respond follows in sections 2 – 7.

2.0 Undertake an audit, within existing resources, of single use plastics used by the authority

- 2.1 An audit could be undertaken (within available resources) with consideration given to areas where higher volumes of single use plastics may arise. As take away or convenience foods are a large source of plastic waste, services that operate cafes, vending machines or provide other forms of food and drink would be prioritised, looking for sustainable alternative options where appropriate.

3.0 The Council will play its role in helping to educate members of the public about plastic waste

- 3.1 The existing recycling and waste minimisation advice provided to residents could be extended to include information about avoiding excess plastic packaging and single use items.
- 3.2 When appropriate the internet and social media could both be used to provide information about reducing plastic waste. The information available on our own web site could be extended and links to other expert sites and examples of good practice included.
- 3.3 Calendars detailing refuse collections for next year are already printed ready for distribution prior to Christmas. Future written communications could include additional advice about plastic waste.

- 3.3 The recycling encouragement team provide face to face information to residents. Their education programme could be extended to include single use plastics.
- 4.0 The Council will use its membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority to work towards increasing the amount of plastic product that can be recycled through doorstep and other recycling.**
- 4.1 Ways to increase the range of plastics, and other materials, recycled need to be explored. Regional working may increase the potential for Walsall to access new initiatives.
- 5.0 Write to our members of Parliament and the European Parliament, and to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, urging them to consider legislation and regulations which will reduce the amount of single use plastic**
- 5.1 The problems of excess and single use plastic waste is a local, national and international concern. Pressure or regulation is needed on producers and retailers to reduce excess packaging and single use plastics and to give consumers the opportunity to buy more sustainable alternatives. The Portfolio Holder for Clean and Green could write to our MPs, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the European Parliament about the need for legislative control and regulation of plastics.
- 6.0 Use the links we have with businesses in Walsall to encourage them to reduce the amount of plastic waste produced**
- 6.1 We could use the existing links we have with local businesses via trade waste collection contracts to raise the awareness of the impact of single use plastics and help them reduce the amount of plastic waste they produce.
- 7.0 Write to each of our major supermarkets asking them to consider introducing a “plastic free aisle” in their Walsall store(s) on a trial basis**
- 7.1 The world’s first plastic free supermarket aisle opened in Amsterdam in February 2018 but as yet UK supermarkets have not followed this example.
- 7.2 A cultural shift away from single-use plastic to biodegradable materials could be achieved with the support of food retailers. Supermarket chains have made some progress in recent years to reduce the use of plastic bags but more could be done to reduce the overall use of plastics by giving people the choice to buy plastic free products. We could contact the major food retailers in Walsall expressing the Authorities support for ‘Plastic Free’ and our wish to see a Plastic Free Aisle, or Plastic Free products, promoted in our shops.

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