

SUBJECT:	PLASTIC FREE MONMOUTHSHIRE
MEETING:	STRONG COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
DATE:	24TH MAY 2018
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	

1. PURPOSE:

1.1 To advise the Select Committee of:

- The efforts being undertaken within Monmouthshire communities to reduce the use of single-use plastics
- The progress the Council is making in reducing the use of single-use plastics

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Select Committee consider making a policy commitment to become a 'plastic free county' through reducing single use plastics, in line with the Plastic Free Coastline campaign run by Surfers Against Sewage
- 2.2 That Select Committee agree to keep informed of community developments to reduce plastic and to scrutinise the Council's progress towards becoming a Plastic Free County.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 There has been a huge increase in interest in reducing the use of single-use plastics in the last few months, not least because of the shocking scenes of plastic contamination in our oceans shown on the BBC's Blue Planet series. Single use plastics use precious fossil fuels, take hundreds of years to break down, injure wildlife on land and at sea, blight the landscape as litter, block drains and cost money to buy, clear up and dispose of.
- 3.2 This has resulted in actions being taken at local, regional and national levels:
- 3.3 **Local Action:** Abergavenny, Chepstow, Monmouth and Usk all now have active and enthusiastic Plastic Free community groups in operation, often as an offshoot of the Transition Town and local litter groups. The groups report more public interest in Plastic-Free than in any other previous Transition Town campaign. As part of the Plastic-Free work happening in the towns, some (but not all) of the towns are working towards becoming Plastic Free communities, under an accreditation scheme run by Surfers Against Sewage. For more details see <https://www.sas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Plastic-Free-Coastlines-Community-Toolkit.pdf>
- 3.4 The steps to get Plastic Free status include:

1. Local Governance - Local Council (County, Town, Parish or Community) passes a resolution to support Plastic Free Coastlines, committing to plastic free alternatives and supporting plastic free initiatives within the constituency.

2. Local Businesses - At least three single-use plastic items removed from local businesses and retailers; replaced with sustainable alternatives. Target number of businesses are determined by population.

3. Allies/Local Community – gain widespread community support for Plastic Free Coastlines, spreading the Plastic Free message and establishing the call to arms e.g. schools, community groups, community spaces etc.

4. On the Ground Action - At least two local community events arranged and made open for all to attend, in one calendar year e.g. litterpicks, beach cleans

5. Strategic Group - Local group of stakeholders to meet at least once per year to discuss the progress of Plastic Free Coastlines locally; agreeing and setting direction, meeting objectives, and completing application for official Plastic Free Coastlines status.

3.5 **MCC Action:** The council have taken a number of steps to reduce plastic waste, prompted by a number of factors including: the cost of picking up litter, public pressure, the Council's obligation to reduce, re-use and recycle more, problems caused by drains and culverts being blocked by litter and so on.

3.6 Some of this work is still at an early stage, but includes:

- At our Education Centre near Abergavenny, the One Planet Centre has been teaching school children and new staff (on induction training) the importance of reducing single use plastic for many years.
- We are also working with Keep Wales Tidy, Welsh Government and others at a policy and a practical level.
- In the Waste and Street Services team we are discussing the potential use of re-usable recycling bags over single use as we realise that we need to get our own house in order if we are to ask others to improve.
- We have met with our procurement team, school and meals on wheels catering services to identify where changes can be implemented, this will not be an overnight thing due to the scale of operations but officers and council members are genuinely committed to influencing and implementing real change.
- Some of our primary schools are looking at alternatives to the small plastic milk containers but this is early days.
- We have also written to our leisure centres, secondary schools, town and community councils, village halls and Coleg Gwent who operate on our Usk site to eliminate or reduce their own use of all single use plastics and polystyrene (this includes cups and straws).
- We are investigating alternatives to the use of disposable cups, cutlery and milk capsules in our own buildings. For example in 2017/18 we used: Plastic cups - 8000 - £115.52, Disposable black ripple coffee cups – 9000 - £611.64, Milk pots – 222 boxes (120 per box) - 26,640 - £999, Plastic Stirrers – nil, Plastic spoons – 23 bags (100 per bag) - 2,300 - £8.97

- We have written to the local chambers of trade and our work with businesses is just starting. We will shortly be producing postcards saying “Love the food, hate the packaging” and “Love your takeaway, hate the packaging” which can be handed in to local shops and takeaways, and posters to encourage takeaways to go Plastic-Free.
- We support over 140 local Litter Champions who undertake volunteer litter picking regularly in their own areas. We provide litter picking kits and collect the resulting bags of litter.
- We are developing a Litter Strategy which aims to reduce the amount of litter, including plastics on our roadsides.

3.7 Although there is not currently a set process for achieving Plastic-Free County status, we have spoken to Surfers Against Sewage who have explained that it is likely to include the following broad areas of work:

- Audit of County Council consumption of unnecessary single use plastic and addressing this
- Engagement with schools and others, e.g. arranging plastic-free schools workshops and encouraging schools to adopt the SAS plastic-free schools process
- Supporting voluntary and community efforts to achieve plastic-free status, volunteer litter picking activity etc
- Adopting a resolution to build on community efforts to make Monmouthshire Plastic-Free
- Work with partners such as the Wildlife Trust, Wye Valley AONB, Keep Wales Tidy, Canal and Rivers Trust, Living Levels Landscape Partnership, Wye and Usk Foundation, Monnow River Association, Natural Resources Wales etc. to embed the principle of working towards plastic-free status amongst a broader set of organisations with mutually shared aims.

3.8 **Welsh Government Action:** In line with the UK Government for England and the Scottish Government, Welsh Government has committed to develop an action plan to reduce disposable plastics, with measures being considered including deposit return schemes, water bottle refill schemes, better plastic recycling and a levy on disposable coffee cups. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-44004779>

3.9 In line with the UK Government Welsh Government has also committed to banning the use of microbeads.

3.10 Since 2011 the Carrier Bag Levy introduced in Wales has hugely reduced the numbers of single-use carrier bags used in Wales by around three-quarters.

3.11 **UK Government Action:** Recent announcements by the UK Government include a 25 year plan to “eradicate all avoidable plastic waste”, consideration of a deposit return scheme, a proposed ban on plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds and a proposed tax on single-use plastics. The Government has committed £60 million to develop new ways to address the issue of plastic waste.

3.12 **Industry Action:** A number of supermarkets and retailers have committed to reducing plastic use. Iceland have led the way, committing to removing plastic from its own brand

products within 5 years. Many others are now following suit.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/supermarkets-plan-reduce-plastic-pointless-packaging/>

- 3.13 More than 40 companies, including Britain's biggest supermarkets, Coca Cola, Nestle and Procter & Gamble, have promised to hit a target by 2025 to eliminate unnecessary single-use plastic packaging in the United Kingdom. Signing up to the UK Plastics Pact, launched in April by sustainability campaign group WRAP, they have pledged that 100 percent of plastic packaging will be reusable, recyclable or compostable by that date. Other targets are that 70 percent of plastic packaging is effectively recycled or composted, and that all plastic packaging will have 30 percent average recycled content.

4. REASONS:

- 4.1 There are clear environmental, sustainability and financial reasons for reducing the use of single-use plastics in Monmouthshire, both within communities and also within the County Council.
- 4.2 There is growing public and political pressure to take action to protect our countryside and oceans and the Council should be leading by example. Plastic Free status is not saying we are perfect but rather it is the start of the journey towards more sustainable resource use in line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. There is much to do but we are excited about the public's appetite for change.
- 4.3 If the Council were to gain Plastic-Free status, we would be one of the first County Councils to do so, and we have significant numbers of volunteers and partners who would help us with this work given the huge interest and support from community partners in the county.
- 4.4 The council's Corporate Plan sets a clear goal to develop and deliver a sustainable plan for enhancing the local environment including: Improving how we deal with litter and fly-tipping; Minimise the amount of waste that is sent to landfill; Reducing waste by committing to the principles of a 'circular economy' and Reducing the carbon footprint of Council operations. Developing a policy on single use plastics would have positive impact on these while making a clear contribution to our purpose of building sustainable and resilient communities.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 Work is already being undertaken by the Council to support the drive to reduce single use plastics both in-house and in the community. This work is being undertaken within existing officer time from staff in the Waste team, Policy and Partnerships and Procurement. There are also potential links to work being carried out by the Green Infrastructure team and Flooding.
- 5.2 There is a budget of £3000 that has been set aside for plastic reduction work in 2018/19 from the Welsh Government Environment and Sustainable Development Grant which will support this work.

- 5.3 There is the potential that procuring alternatives to plastics may have some cost implications. The details of this and alternative options are not yet known, but would need to be given further consideration when more information is known.
- 5.4 There are a huge amount of volunteer hours being given by communities to reduce plastic use. By working in partnership with these groups, we are able to be more effective and make MCC resources go further. As well as working in partnership with groups listed in 3.7, thought should also be given to partnership working with a wider network of partners such as the Environment Partnership Board and potentially the Public Service Board.

6. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 6.1 There are multiple positive contributions to the wellbeing goals associated with reducing plastic use, which will benefit the local and global environment, reduce resource use, make communities more attractive and save money on litter collection. There may be some additional costs for businesses or the Council when sourcing alternatives to plastic use, but there may also be savings on purchase and disposal of plastic waste.
- 6.2 Working on plastic free status has been and will continue to use the five ways of working by preventing long term pollution and by working in collaboration internally and with communities and other partners.
- 6.3 There is no impact on protected characteristics.

7. CONSULTEES:

Plastic Free Monmouth, Chepstow, Abergavenny and Usk
Waste and Street Services
Procurement
Green Infrastructure and Countryside
Office Services
Policy and Governance

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Plastic Free Coastlines Community Toolkit
<https://www.sas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Plastic-Free-Coastlines-Community-Toolkit.pdf>

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