

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE SUBJECT 3

23 JULY 2018

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

PLASTIC FREE BRIDGEND COUNTY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee on the topic of plastic waste pollution and the proposal for a “Plastic Free Bridgend County”.

2. CONNECTION TO CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN/OTHER PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The report links to the following Corporate Priority:

Priority Three: Smarter use of resources

This means the Authority will ensure that all its resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council’s priorities.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the Council meeting of the 25 April 2018, a Motion on Notice was put forward regarding plastic waste pollution and support for Bridgend County becoming a plastic free Authority. The Motion was withdrawn and it was considered that the matter should instead be sent to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify what action the Council has taken to date and any next steps.

4.0 CURRENT SITUATION / PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The proposed position for the Authority in regard to single use plastics and promoting a “Plastic Free Bridgend” represents a sentiment that is virtuous and seemingly aligned to principles of sustainability and protection of future generations.
- 4.2 The negative impact of all plastic products single use and otherwise contaminating the environment is significant and has been brought heavily into public focus recently by the “Blue Planet” BBC television series.
- 4.3 Clearly any steps the Authority can take to further reduce reasonably the environmental impact of its own activities and the activities of those it can influence should be welcomed.

- 4.4 The Authority currently undertakes significant activities in relation to plastics recycling, providing a weekly recycling service to every household that results in 2109 tonnes of plastics per year being recycled from the kerbside.
- 4.5 For plastic materials that cannot be recycled at the doorstep, such as hard plastic (i.e. garden furniture, children's toys), recycling outlets are provided at the Community Recycling Centres (CRC) sites resulting in a further 1197 tonnes per annum of plastics being recycled. In addition, the introduction of the new Absorbent Hygiene Products (AHPs) collection service has diverted 1128 tonnes of material per annum from the residual waste stream to a recycling facility.
- 4.6 Within the Council office environment changes have taken place in the majority of departments and plastic cups, spoons or milk sachets are no longer purchased and loose coffee, milk and sugar is used in meetings where refreshments cannot be avoided.
- 4.7 In Elections on count night, where individual milk sachets have been used in the past, now large cartons/bottles of milk are used and the spoons are also now wooden spatulas; however, polystyrene cups are used because of the hot drinks facility provided and these are not recyclable.

There are very few alternatives to the polystyrene cups and these are expensive, e.g. compostable cups. However, the Returning Officer has agreed to only provide hot/cold drink facilities for future elections but inviting candidates, agents and staff to bring with them their own re-usable cups if they wish to make use of these facilities and to look at the option of providing for sale such cups at the Count venue with any proceeds going to the Mayor's Charity. This will also apply to water bottles for Count staff whilst at the Count tables.

- 4.8 Whilst positive action has already been taken, the impact and definition of a "Plastic-Free Bridgend" is complex and the benefits potentially not as clear as they may initially appear.
- 4.9 The change would be far reaching and would affect every part of the Authority, with many departments being involved.
- 4.10 A study to comprehend the Authority's total usage of single use plastics and other avoidable plastics across all departments and facilities would need to be carried and alternatives explored and costs both fiscal and environmental understood.
- 4.11 To highlight the complexity of this issue, attached as **Appendix A** is a recent article published in Let's Recycle online that discusses the merits of single use plastic bags for the containment of recyclable food. At a time of austerity, this is of relevance to the Authority, as in this case a move from a degradable sack to a single use plastic sack potentially offers a saving with seemingly minimal environmental impact. Also attached as **Appendix B & C** respectively are articles published on the internet. Appendix B from the Independent examines the negative impact of plastic on the environment, whilst Appendix C produced by the British Plastics Federation presents interesting food for thought in regard to the environmental benefits of plastics.

4.12 Similarly, highlighting the complexity of a move to remove single use plastics, the residual waste presentation for fortnightly collection in Bridgend takes place via the use of single use plastic sacks. To embrace fully a move away from single use plastics would realistically involve a move to a wheeled bin waste collection system, which was a consideration previously discounted in the build-up to the new waste collection system. This change now would potentially involve a capital commitment in the region of £1 million, increased collection costs would result and the Authority would introduce bins to terraced houses, where such containment would have questionable suitability, while at the same time positively effecting a saving on ongoing sack purchase.

4.13 Recycling within the BCBC offices: The new Corporate Landlord team was created earlier in the year and became live in April. This team includes both “hard” and “soft” Facilities Management (FM) services to Council departments. The soft FM currently comprises cleaning, caretaking and recycling services at the Council’s core office buildings under the Building Services Support team.

Recycling is currently collected in respect of :

- General waste
- Plastic
- Cardboard
- Cans
- Paper
- Confidential waste

4.14 Since setting up the new team, the department has started to explore the possibility of expanding the service to include food waste with new contractors. In the process, the Authority anticipates making savings of possibly £6000 p.a.

4.15 The Council’s Cleaner Streets Department is currently looking at new innovative ways to combat littering and the use of single use plastics by identifying initiatives that either encourage prevention or reduce use, by engaging with local groups, schools and business to engender a positive attitude towards our communities, town centres and environment.

4.16 Discussions are currently taking place with Town Councils to explore options in partnership with Keep Wales Tidy to engage with schools on running a competition to design anti-litter signage, posters and stickers.

The project will: -

- Engage with local schools in an educational programme about litter.
- Promote the campaign to the wider community through BCBC PR channels, flyers, window stickers, etc.

- Engage with local businesses to reduce plastic waste and become part of the litter-free scheme and businesses will be asked to display a sticker in the window of premises supporting a litter and plastic-free area.
- Asking business to switch materials – most importantly reducing expanded polystyrene. Ideally, for now, either cardboard (although once contaminated with grease cannot be recycled) or 100% recycled (and *recyclable*) plastic containers. While plastics are considered to adversely impact on the environment, it is important to proceed with caution, as alternatives can often be just as harmful. There is also a view that, if people see something as harmless or biodegradable, it is more likely to become litter.
- Encourage every business to sign-up to the Refill app indicating that they offer water freely.

4.17 In the past year, Cleaner Streets and Keep Wales Tidy have been actively promoting litter picker champions and engagement with various group to establish a calendar of events over the year, where individuals or groups can become involved. This has worked well and the Authority will look to use the volunteer groups as its steer.

4.18 Further general communications throughout the past 12 months have taken place and are attached in summary as **Appendix D**.

4.19 The promotion of Fairtrade policies and shop local scheme is not currently undertaken by the Council and would require the necessary commitment of officer time and promotional budget, at a time of upcoming significant MTFS savings. Whilst some general messaging on the Council website and social media could be achieved at low cost, anything further than this would need to be considered carefully.

4.20 Attached as **Appendix E** and **Appendix F** are letters from the Leader of Bridgend County Borough Council and response from Hannah Blythyn, Assembly Minister for Environment for information.

5. EFFECT UPON POLICY FRAMEWORK & PROCEDURE RULES

5.1 None for the purposes of this report and at this stage of consideration.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment

7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. As the report is for noting, it is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report. However an assessment based on the 5 ways of working under the Act and any requisite mitigating measures would be required prior to any variation being made policy.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None for the purposes of this report and at this stage of consideration. However, it is clear that significant cost implications could result from the Authority becoming plastic free.

9. RECOMMENDATION

9.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the report and the action taken to date.

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July 2018

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Background Documents: None