Report to OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Sustainable Food Cities Network and encouraging better food and drink related recycling practices across organisations in Oldham

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Brownridge, Cabinet Member for Neighborhoods and Cooperatives

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14 March 2017

Purpose of the Report
To provide information about a variety of avenues for further exploration regarding more sustainable use of plastic bottles and cups by businesses and other organisations across the borough.

Executive Summary
A number of different opportunities have been identified to encourage more sustainable use of plastic bottles and cups by businesses and other organisations across the borough. Pursuing these opportunities would be in line with the values and commitments as members of the Sustainable Food Cities Network and general environmental responsibilities. Some of these options would be relatively simple to implement whereas the Council has a limited sphere of influence over the others.

Recommendations
The recommendations of this report are to note the positive actions that could be taken regarding some of the avenues and that others are either legislated for already in terms of producer responsibility regulations (see Appendix 1) and/or are already more appropriately being lobbied for at regional or national level.
Sustainable Food Cities Network and encouraging better food and drink related recycling practices across organisations in Oldham

1 Background

1.1 The following motion was referred to O&S Board in January 2017:

“This Council is proud to be a member of the Sustainable Food Cities Network and as a member is committed ‘Reducing waste and the ecological footprint of the food system’. Council notes with concern that this commitment will be more difficult to achieve when:

- Most beverage cups dispensed by coffee outlets cannot be recycled
- The production of bottled water necessitates wasteful processing, bottling and transportation, and when its consumption leads to the discarding of millions of plastic bottles
- Much of the packaging used for food products cannot easily be recycled

Council aspires instead to reduce food packaging and promote recycling across the borough whenever possible.

Council further notes that these aspirations are compatible with the aims of the initiative, the Courthauld Commitment 2025, where signatories pledge to work to reduce ‘the resource needed to provide our food and drink by one-fifth over ten years.’ The resolutions proposed were:

1. Drinking cups at water and coffee machines in Council buildings were all recyclable and were recycled.
2. Local coffee outlets to be encouraged to adopt recyclable cups, provide on-site recycling facilities, provide multi-use cups and offer discounts to customers who brought their own cups.
3. The provision of public drinking fountains and free drinking water be promoted in all catering outlets and schools.
4. The relevant Cabinet Members and officers be asked to investigate the merits of becoming a signatory to the Courthauld Commitment 2025 and report back on their findings no later than six months from now.
5. The Chief Executive be asked to write to the:
   - Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority requesting investment in the technology needed to recycle the food packaging that was not currently recycled
   - Relevant Government Minister asking the Government to create a market for the sale and reuse the materials (such as low-grade plastics) that are not currently recycled.

1.2 The remainder of this report, explores the current position as well as opportunities and barriers to progress on each of these topics.
2.0 Results of initial investigation on each topic

2.1 Drinking cups in the Civic Centre (That drinking cups at water and coffee machines in Council buildings are all recyclable and were recycled)

2.1.1 The current hot drink vending & water machines within the Civic Centre a supplied with a mixture of recyclable and non-recyclable cups.

2.1.2 This is because each machine is maintained by a different team (e.g. Business Support, Facilities, Unity, etc) depending on where they are stationed and therefore cup provision is not consistent. The majority of these cups cannot be recycled through the facilities in the Civic Centre. There are a variety of companies that supply machines with cups which could be either recycled within Civic Centre or collected/sent back to the supplier.

2.1.3 A short term solution would be for all teams who look after a vending or water machine to commit to only ordering paper cups which can be recycled.

2.1.4 To ensure this solution is sustainable however, a further development could be for the supply and maintenance of these machines needs to become the responsibility of one service in order to ensure consistency going forwards.

2.2 Local coffee outlets (That local coffee outlets be encouraged to adopt recyclable cups, provide on-site recycling facilities, provide multi-use cups and offer discounts to customers who brought their own cups).

2.2.1 There has been a growing movement towards more sustainable practices amongst the big, multinational coffee chains – in part due to their obligations under producer responsibility legislation and in part through their drive towards corporate social responsibility. Some examples of this are as follows:

- July 2016 – Starbucks trial a 100% paper cup
- July 2016 – Costa trial in-store recycling systems in 50 stores
- October 2016 – Giant coffee cup recycling bins in Manchester (led by Caffe Nero, Costa and McDonalds)
- November 2016 – Starbucks in-store recycling bins rolled out in 21 stores in central and west London

2.2.2 Whilst these are positive developments, they are still at a very early stage, having all only been trialled or launched in the later part of 2016. Introducing effective recycling provision is acknowledged within the industry as a challenging arena for a number of different reasons, including cost of researching and procuring recyclable goods, investment in on-site facilities and the natural tension arising when businesses encourage behaviour change amongst consumers which may be
perceived as inconvenient and/or a reason not to opt for the brand or company in question.

2.2.3 For small businesses, these challenges are exacerbated (e.g. costs are potentially prohibitive, who funds any discount, etc.) However, there are lots of options to engage and establish levels of interest and appetite in the first instance through Chambers of Commerce, Business Breakfast, Twitter, Facebook, Oldham Hour, website, existing ono-to-one relationships/account management, Oldham Enterprise, Business Growth Hub etc.

2.2.4 For further context, the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority has not fed into any lobbying or initiatives related to the big national chains to adopt cups that can be recycled as paper and cardboard due to the legislation already in place and the fact that coffee cups have not been flagged as a contamination issue at processing facilities (i.e. they are being recycled correctly).

2.3 Drinking water in schools (That the provision of public drinking fountains and free drinking water be promoted in all catering outlets and schools).

2.3.1 Pupils in all primary schools across Oldham already have access to water through drinking fountains or water machines so there is no need for them to bring bottled water into schools. In a joint initiative with United Utilities, Public Health are in the early stages of an project to introduce this approach in secondary schools across Oldham (i.e. fountains and water machines) in order to promote drinking water instead of fizzy drinks amongst pupils.

2.3.2 Further to this, through existing links with primary schools, there may be an opportunity to encourage parents who still send primary children with bottled water to refrain and use fountains and water machines to top up flasks and re-fillable bottles.

2.3.3 However, it should be noted that any positive promotions across schools would be subject to each school’s drinking water policy as established by each school’s board of governors and matters may be further complicated at secondary school level, where there are a wide variety of different arrangements in place – both from a utilities/facilities in place and the overarching governance of the school (e.g. Academies).

2.4 Courtauld Commitment: That the relevant Cabinet Members and officers be asked to investigate the merits of becoming a signatory to the Courtauld Commitment 2025 and report back on their findings no later than six months from now.

2.4.1 The Courtauld Commitment is a voluntary agreement between WRAP and the food and beverage retail sector designed to prevent and minimise food waste in the UK. The Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority (GMWDA) signed up to the Courtauld Agreement in October 2016. The initiative fits well with the Authority’s priorities on waste prevention, increasing composting and encouraging more sustainable behaviour. One of the key aims of the Authority’s long-term communications strategy is waste prevention and minimisation including reducing food waste across Greater Manchester.
2.4.2 Working with other members and stakeholders enables the Authority to support, influence and share best practice on a variety of areas including policy, research, consumer engagement, messaging and communications. The Authority is also currently engaged with Europe, via Viridor, the Co-operative Group and the AGMA Low Carbon Group specifically.

2.4.3 Initial enquires have been made through WRAP regarding the benefits of Oldham Council as a collection authority becoming a signatory (i.e. whether this would be a symbolic gesture of our commitments to the principles or whether there are active measure we would take as members) and discussions would also be necessary with the GMWDA to avoid duplication communications effort and activity with residents.

2.4.4 Feedback from WRAP regarding the context and benefits was as follows:

- The opportunity to be part of the Courthauld Commitment has only recently been opened to Local Authorities and the focus has been on signing up Waste Disposal Authorities (rather than Waste Collection Authorities like Oldham)
- Councils are being considered “engagement” partners rather than “delivery” partners like the food and drinks industry signatories.
- Benefits include prioritised access to Love Food Hate Waste campaign resources and training, the opportunity to be part of working groups on food waste to share best practice and from a symbolic perspective, to be signed up to the most well-known food waste prevention initiative in the UK.
- There are no major requirements other than promoting the objectives and amplifying the core campaign messages

2.4.5 Whilst the benefits are clear, it is worth giving consideration to the resource that would be needed to realise these benefits (“you get out what you put in”) and acknowledging that this could also risk diluting the strength of messaging over the last 12 months which, backed by a wide range of evidence, has been grounded on very simple principles of telling people what goes in which bin. Food waste prevention is another subject matter in and of itself and as such, the main responsibility for this has generally fallen with the GMWDA on behalf of all Greater Manchester Councils.

2.5 Plastics Recycling: The Chief Executive be asked to write to the:

2.5.1 Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority requesting investment in the technology needed to recycle the food packaging that was not currently recycled

2.5.2 The subject of food packaging recycling is a long-standing topic of debate across all collection and disposal authorities in the UK. As such, the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority’s comprehensive stance is as below.
2.5.3 In summary however, an investment in technology is secondary to the primary issue - due to the mixture of different types of plastics used in packaging, there is currently very limited market for reprocessing this material. Only when there is consistency in the plastic polymers used for food and drinks packaging – which would require a change in national legislation - would there be any viability in investing in technology.

2.5.4 The current position for plastics recycling is that there are well established markets for plastic bottles (mostly made from the PET plastic polymer) but not other plastics used for food and drink containment e.g. food trays, bags and film. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) undertake market studies each year for the main recyclable materials including plastics and the 2016 plastics report published in April this year concludes that there are "no current end markets for separately baled clear PET trays" (i.e. plastic trays also made out of PET.) There are a number of reasons for this but principally the plastics reprocessors prefer the bottle PET as this is high quality and will not have been blended with lower quality polymers, which is what happens with some trays. The current suppressed oil price is also reducing demand for recycled plastics as plastics produced from raw hydrocarbons are actually cheaper to produce at the moment.

2.5.5 Plastics recycling is driven by economics and demand and as such, there are now c. 70% of local authorities collecting pots, tubs and trays on the back of public demand. However, based on WRAP data, around 62% of all plastics collected (household and commercial) in the UK actually ends up being disposed of rather than recycled. This is a very disappointing statistic and needs action at a national level to address this.

2.5.6 Essentially, whilst other councils do collect these pots, tubs and trays, the limitation on markets means that very little of the non-bottle plastic will actually be recycled, the most likely outcome will be that these materials are separated from the plastic bottles and then treated as a residue for energy generation.

2.5.7 The GMWDA is lobbying for consistency in the use of plastic polymers for pots, tubs and trays. There is a good market for polypropylene (PP) yoghurt pots but not all pots/trays are made of PP, instead cheaper alternate polymers are used that reprocessors do not want. If PP has a sustainable market then a simple solution is for packaging manufacturers to consistently only use PP. That will require either legislation or a binding commitment to implement that change, hence the need for central Government action to address this.

2.5.8 The Authority is committed to its aim of zero waste and continues to lobby for consistency in the use of plastic polymers for pots, tubs and trays. The Authority is continuously monitoring the plastics market and should viable markets develop for pots, tubs and trays in the future then the Authority would look to increase the range of plastic materials that can be collected from households for recycling.
2.5.9 The relevant Government Minister asks the Government to create a market for the sale and reuse the materials (such as low-grade plastics) that are not currently recycled.

2.5.10 This is another topic that is already being lobbied for by the GMWDA rather than the nine individual collection authorities as follows:

2.5.11 UK environmental legislation is principally governed by European legislation, with virtually all waste regulations referenced to the EU, and therefore falling within its legal jurisdiction. The targets within this suite of legislation are in the process of being reviewed. The European Commission (EC) has drafted Circular Economy proposals to update existing laws and put in place an action plan.

2.5.12 Those proposals are being further developed under the Parliamentary Procedure, prior to approval by the EU Parliament, and final negotiations at the Environment Council between Members States. It is expected that following the UK negotiated exit from the EU, the final Circular Economy proposals will still shape UK policy to some extent. The GMWDA has been pro-actively engaging in these areas of policy development at a pan European level for around two years - currently working with Cllr. Kevin Peel (Committee of the Regions – NW England representative) and the GM Brussels Office/North West Members of the European Parliament (through Theresa Griffin MEP)/Seb Dance (lead SD Party representative on Environment) to lobby on the final drafting points of the Circular Economy proposals.

2.5.13 The Authority is also working with other Joint Waste Disposal Authorities (who together with the GMWDA account for over 16% of England’s municipal waste) on the potential translation of the European direction of travel into an English Waste Strategy (the principalities already having their own strategies).

2.5.14 Together with the Chartered Institute of Waste Management a paper has been circulated setting out their collective thoughts and aspirations for England which should be higher and more targeted. The GMWDA agrees with UK Government that the Circular Economy proposals embody the right concept, though some refinement about the role of targets is needed (i.e. at a high level waste is not the issue as we need to step back to reduce waste and then produce items such as packaging with reuse and recycling in mind).

2.5.15 The GMWDA will continue to work with the other Joint Waste Disposal Authorities and across the wider sector (via Viridor). Also renewing efforts to engage more widely via the Local Government Association (LGA) on an English Waste Policy so as to maximise influence on DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs responsible for waste legislation and policy).
3.0 Recommendations

3.1 Drinking cups in the Civic Centre
In the short term, that all services order recyclable cups and in the longer term, all drinks machines to come under one team. It is also recommend that the options outlined here be encompassed within the Council’s existing ISO 14000 accreditation work.

3.2 Local coffee outlets
That initial engagement with businesses is pursued but that the barriers to uptake be recognised.

3.3 Drinking water in schools
To ask the Public Health team for an update on the existing joint initiative with United Utilities.

3.4 Courthauuld Commitment
To note the results of the investigation so far and agree that further discussion is needed with the GMWDA to avoid duplication communications effort and activity with residents.

3.5 Plastics recycling

3.5.1 Investment in technology – to note that there are currently more fundamental parameters to better plastics recycling than technological barriers and the GMWDA’s ongoing work to address this.

3.5.2 Development of markets – to note the policy and legislative challenges and the GMWDA’s ongoing work to address this.
Appendix 1

*Producer Responsibility Regulations

Producer responsibility is about making sure businesses that manufacture, import and sell these products are responsible for their end of life environmental impact.

A suite of existing regulations require businesses to:

1.0
- minimise waste arising from these products and promote their re-use
- ensure the waste products are treated and meet recovery and recycling targets for the waste materials
- design products by reducing material use and enhancing reusability and recyclability

2.0

These regulations apply to businesses in different ways. For example, businesses with a turnover of more than £2 million a year and/or are involved with the production of over a certain tonnage of packaging annually, have greater obligations than others.