

COUNCIL

Sustainable Cities Food Network Update

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Brownridge, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Cooperatives

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Background

Council will recall that a motion was referred to Overview and Scrutiny Board related to recycling. The motion in full was as follows:

““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.

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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.”

Responses to the Motion

The Overview and Scrutiny Board gave consideration to a report at their meeting held on 14 March 2017. Members were apprised of the following:

1. The recommendation that in the short term all services order recyclable cups and, in the longer term, all drinks machines come under one team, be endorsed and that the options as outlined in the report encompassed within ISO 14000 accreditation work, be endorsed. Work was underway between the relevant services (Procurement, Facilities Management, Corporate Property and the various departments where these drink machines were based) to implement the recommendation. As part of the Council's 'Environmental Management Plan' progress towards this objective would be reported corporately on a quarterly basis.
2. Positive actions that could be taken were either legislated for already in terms of producer responsibility regulations as outlined below and were already more appropriately being lobbied at regional or national level.

“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:

- 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; and
- Design products by reducing material use and enhancing reusability and recyclability.

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.”

3. Pupils in all primary schools in Oldham already had access to water through drinking fountains or water machines. In a joint initiative, Public Health were in the early stages of a project for the introduction of this approach in secondary schools. A further update on this piece of work has been provided as follows:

The focus of the public health project was to work with a small group of young people to develop an oral health project to reduce sugary drinks consumption which could promote drinking water. There was initial interest from a secondary school

(academy). Initial meetings were held with a school representative, the senior oral health practitioner, youth council lead and public health colleagues. Discussions started around the possibility of accrediting the project with the Royal Society of Public Health. Project delivery details (including the availability of suitably qualified staff to manage and deliver, development of teaching materials, registration and accreditation of the project) commenced.

The intended funding was from a one-off source, only available to the end of the financial year. The project had a number of barriers to overcome and with the capacity and resources available it was not possible to undertake all the work needed to progress the project within the financial year.

Whilst this project did not go ahead as anticipated other oral health work continues which aims to achieve the original aims of reducing sugary consumption. The idea was well received and should the occasion arise the learning from the project development so far could help a future project.'

4. Further to this, through existing links there may be an opportunity to encourage parents who sent their primary children with bottled water to refrain from doing so and use fountains and water machines to top up flasks and re-fillable bottles. Promotions across schools would be subject to each school's drinking water policy as established by each school's Board of Governors.
5. The Board was informed that an investigation had been made into the Courthauld agreement. Initial discussions had taken place with the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority. Waste prevention (including food waste prevention) was now a clear and distinct strand of the Waste Disposal Authority's Communications and Engagement Strategy (2017-2022) across Greater Manchester so further work to be done to establish on a year-by-year basis where the potential overlap is; the WDA were revisiting the original agreement on signing up to the Courthauld Commitment and the involvement of the collection authorities in this agreement at the time (October 2016). The opportunity to be part of the Courthauld Commitment had only recently been opened to local authorities. Councils were being considered 'engagement' partners rather than 'delivery' partners. Consideration was given to the resource needed and could risk diluting the strength of messaging over the last 12 months of telling people what goes in which bin.
6. Food packaging recycling was a long-standing topic of debate. Investment in technology was secondary to the primary issue due to the mixture of different types of plastics used in packaging. Only when there was consistency in the plastic polymers used for food and drinks packaging – which required a change in national legislation – would there be any viability in technology investment. The GMWDA was lobbying for consistency in the use of plastic polymers for pots, tubs and trays.
7. The creation of a market for the sale and reuse of materials such as low-grade plastics was already being lobbied for by the GMWDA. UK environmental legislation was principally governed by European legislation. The targets within this suite of legislation were in the process of being reviewed. Proposals were being further developed under Parliamentary Procedure. It was expected that following the UK negotiated exit from the EU, the final Circular Economy proposals would still shape UK policy.

Further information can be found in the report sent to Overview and Scrutiny Board on 14th March 2017 at:
<http://decisionrecording.oldham.gov.uk/documents/s77582/Recycling%20Motion%20Report.pdf>