

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Council
DATE	4 March 2019
REPORT TITLE	The ' Final Straw ' - campaign to ban plastic drinking straws in Scotland
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/19/184
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Operating Officer
CHIEF OFFICER	Mark Reilly, Chief Officer Operations & Protective Services
REPORT AUTHOR	Andy Campbell, Facilities Manager
TERMS OF REFERENCE	Introduction – 6 (previous Council decision)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Council on the results of the consultation which has taken place with the Disability Equity Partnership (DEP) and other consultees and to advise that a procedure for ensuring people with disabilities can access a fully flexible plastic drinking straw will not be required, as there are now fully flexible Polylactic Acid (PLA) drinking straws available on the market.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council:-

- 2.1 Notes the consultation undertaken with the DEP and other suggested consultees and the responses received.
- 2.2 Instructs Chief Officers and requests that all ALEOs who currently purchase fully flexible plastic drinking straws, to purchase the identified PLA alternative with immediate effect.
- 2.3 Instructs the Chief Officer Commercial & Procurement Services to amend the disposables suppliers purchase catalogues under their control, to remove fully flexible plastic drinking straws.
- 2.4 Instructs Chief Officers to install simple "Drinking straws available if required" signs at all points of sale where liquids are available for purchase; the design and placement of these signs will be subject to further consultation with the DEP.

- 2.5 Instructs Chief Officers to undertake consultation with the DEP, prior to the removal of any other single use plastic item, where the removal of that item may be discriminatory to persons with disabilities.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In late 2017, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) screened the 'Blue Planet 2'. The final episode focused on the ecological damage caused to the planet from plastics which were finding their way into watercourses and ultimately polluting beaches, seas and oceans, highlighting the impact that the issue was having on marine life.
- 3.2 On 12th January 2018, Kate Forbes MSP wrote to our Chief Executive, to bring 'The Final Straw' campaign to her attention, to advise that an online petition had been launched calling on businesses and organisations to ban plastic straws and to ask if Aberdeen City Council would commit to being plastic straw free.
- 3.3 An initial report (CHI/18/012) was considered by Council at its meeting on the 5th March 2018. An update report (OPE/18/129) was considered by Council on 10th September 2018. This report is a further update to those reports.
- 3.4 At the time the initial report was written, Aberdeen City Council's Facilities Management (FM) Catering Service provided a plastic drinking straw with fruit juice cuplets which were provided as part of a Primary School meal. This product was removed from service with our school pupils now receiving either drinking water or milk with their meals, served in a rigid reusable plastic tumbler.
- 3.5 An exhaustive review of products was undertaken by the FM Catering Service with the purpose being the replacement of all other plastic disposables used by the service, with plant based compostable alternatives. This review was shared with Council as an appendix in report OPE/18/129. The plant based compostable products have entered service at each site where catering is provided, as stock of the plastic products being replaced have been exhausted.
- 3.6 The FM Catering Service continue to offer drink products for sale to Secondary School pupils, some of which have a plastic straw attached to packaging, the straw being used to puncture a foil straw hole allowing the content to be consumed. Commercial & Procurement Services are continuing to work closely with Scotland Excel and the supply chain in order to find suitable alternative school meal compliant products and these will be introduced as and when they become available.
- 3.7 Aberdeen City Council's Integrated Children's and Family Service provides free milk to eligible school pupils which also have a plastic straw attached to packaging, the straw being used to puncture a foil straw hole allowing the content to be consumed. Through the Scotland Excel frameworks, discussions continue with our existing suppliers around the steps they are taking to supply these products without plastic straws. Instructions have been given to schools on how milk packaging and straws can be best recycled in the interim.

- 3.8 The harm that single use plastics is having on marine life is one which resonates particularly with our young people. The FM Catering Service had received several communications from school pupils seeking assurances that the Council would consider their use of plastic drinking straws and other single use plastics. Elected Members invited children from Airyhall and Hanover Street Schools to attend the meeting of Council on 10th September 2018, when the issue of plastic drinking straws was last considered. It is Aberdeen City Council's desire to gain accreditation from UNICEF on their Child Friendly Cities Initiative, one of the guiding principles of the initiative being 'Respect for views of the child', where children have the right to voice their opinions and have these taken into account in decisions that affect them. The views of our children on the issue of single use plastics are clear and by approving the recommendations in this report, Council can clearly demonstrate that children's views are being listened to and are influencing the decisions we make.
- 3.9 The Final Straw campaign had been included as an agenda item at ALEO meetings attended by the Chief Officer Commercial and Procurement Services in 2018. The Chief Officer had advised that all ALEOs are committed to the Final Straw campaign and that work had been ongoing to reduce use of plastic straws wherever it was possible to do so.
- 3.10 The DEP were formally consulted at its meeting on the 14th November 2018. Feedback received from the group was that there was nobody within their membership who suffered from a disability which made the use of a flexible drinking straw necessary, so suggested that we widen the consultation out to:
- a) Horizons Rehabilitation Centre;
 - b) Neuro Rehabilitation Unit (Woodend Hospital); and
 - c) Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland
- 3.11 Each of the three organisations were contacted by telephone and they provided either named or generic email contacts to send information to. Email consultations were sent initially on the 10th December 2018 and were resent on the 11th January as no feedback had been received.
- 3.12 A telephone conversation took place on the 16th January 2019 between the report author and the Horizons Rehabilitation Centre Manager which was followed up with an exchange of emails. The conversation confirmed that persons who suffer from certain conditions do indeed require a fully flexible drinking straw to enable them to consume liquids and that current paper alternatives weren't adequate, as their integrity quickly fails due to contact with liquid. In addition, there are other single use plastic items which are used by her service for hygiene and practicality reasons, where there are currently no suitable alternatives, namely aprons, single use resuscitation shields and catering plasters.
- 3.13 No feedback was received from either the Neuro Rehabilitation Unit or from Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland.

3.14 Whilst the consultation referenced above was ongoing, work which the FM Catering Service had continued with our disposables supplier, identified that fully flexible PLA drinking straws had become available on the market. The straws maintain their integrity when in contact with both cold and hot fluids and meet standards EN13432:2000 and BS EN13432, the scope of which is specifically compostability and anaerobic digestibility of packaging. Our Waste and Recycling Team confirm that PLA based disposables can be processed by our third-party food waste processor, so can be disposed of with food waste where a commercial food waste collection service is received.

3.15 Following identification of the suitable compostable alternative, further consultation was undertaken with DEP members by email, asking for their opinion on the suggested recommendations in this report. Response from the DEP was that

- The work which the Council is doing to find alternatives to plastic disposables in our buildings is a great initiative;
- Finding an environmentally friendly solution to replace plastic straws was a great step forward;
- To get around any possible discrimination issues, simple signage stating, “Drinking straws available if required” could be used and any person with or without a disability could request one;
- Removing plastic straws from our catalogues would seem a common-sense solution to ensure that no mistakes are made in the ordering process; and
- The general feeling from DEP members was that they were behind the initiative and were grateful for the opportunity to give their opinions and feedback.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The cost of fully flexible PLA drinking straws from our approved disposables supplier is £4.86 per 500. This compares with a cost of £1.34 per 500 (£0.67 per 250) for the currently used black plastic alternative and a cost of £1.58 (£0.79 per 250) for the currently used colour striped plastic alternative. A usage report was received from our disposables supplier detailing the volumes and cost of fully flexible plastic drinking straws which have been purchased by Aberdeen City Council and our Arm’s Length External Organisations for the current financial year to date. This detail is contained in the table below:

Item	Quantity	Cost
Black Plastic Bendy Straw	25 x 250	£16.75
Colour Striped Plastic Bendy Straw	3 x 250	£2.37
Total	28 x 250	£19.12

If the plastic straws were replaced with PLA alternatives, the cost would have been as follows:

Item	Quantity	Cost
Black PLA Compostable Bendy Straw	14 x 500	£68.04

It can be seen from the above, that although the cost of fully flexible PLA straws is greater than that of the currently used plastic alternatives, their use across Aberdeen City Council services and our ALEO's is currently minimal and the very slight cost increase of £48.92 should therefore be manageable for these services.

FM Catering Services do not currently supply straws, but to ensure that we are complying with the suggestions from the DEP, we would purchase one box of 500 straws per site initially. We currently provide catering service at 63 sites, so would incur additional expenditure of £306.18, a cost which again is manageable within the service budget. The feeling is that one box of straws, per site, per year would be more than an adequate supply. The total combined initial additional cost to the Council and its ALEO's for the purchase of fully flexible PLA drinking straws will be **£355.10**.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council had anticipated that its ALEOs would co-operate with the Council and support decisions that have been taken to begin changing our practices in regard to our use of flexible drinking straws and other single use plastics. This anticipation appears to have been realised by the commitment that has been suggested by the Chief Officer Commercial & Procurement at 3.9 above. In future, should matters not progress as anticipated, a review of the contractual and governance relationships between the Council and the ALEO's may be undertaken.
- 5.2 Aberdeen City Council must comply with the Public-sector equality duty laid down in the Equality Act 2010. This includes the Council having to take steps to meet the needs of persons with disabilities that are different from the needs of persons who do not have disabilities. This duty is only enforceable by way of judicial review and does not create any private law rights for individuals.

In terms of the Equality Act, Aberdeen City Council as an employer, has the obligation to make reasonable adjustments for workers who have a disability.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

	Risk	Low (L), Medium (M), High (H)	Mitigation
Financial	Impact on service operational budgets through increased costs for environmentally friendly alternatives	H	Services should limit their use of disposables to an absolute minimum, seeking more cost-effective methods of service delivery where these are practicable.

Legal	Failure to comply with the public sector equality duty	L	Interested parties have been consulted and solutions identified which are legally compliant.
Employee	Failure to comply with the employer obligations to make “reasonable adjustments” for workers with a disability	L	Compostable, fully flexible straws will be made available in Council premises.
Customer	Consideration has been given to customers who for capability reasons, need to use fully flexible drinking straws for consuming fluids.	L	A compostable, fully flexible drinking straw has now been identified.
Environment	Having had the consequences of plastic drinking straws and other single use plastics finding their way into water courses so graphically illustrated by the BBC and other sources following the screening of Blue Planet 2, the environmental damage these items are causing is clear to see, so continuing our use of single use plastics would see ongoing risk to the environment.	H	Implementation of recommendations.
Technology	No risk identified	N/A	
Reputational	As this issue has seen the launch of national campaigns and commitment from the Scottish Government and many other local authorities across the United Kingdom, Aberdeen City Council would face potential reputational damage by	H	Implementation of recommendations

	not showing our commitment to the long-term eradication of single use plastics.		
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7. OUTCOMES

Local Outcome Improvement Plan Themes	
	Impact of Report
Prosperous People	Report OPE/18/129 which preceded this update report gave examples of the views from our young people. We should listen to and respect our young people's wishes, wherever it is feasible for us to do so. Doing so will add weight to the Council's ambition to achieve UNICEF Child Friendly City accreditation.
Prosperous Place	We should do what we can to demonstrate our commitment to being a people friendly city. Our commitment to reducing reliance on single use plastics would have positive impacts on our city's reputation and lead to less plastic waste finding its way into our watercourses, making the city a more attractive place for our citizens and a more attractive destination for visitors.

Design Principles of Target Operating Model	
	Impact of Report
Customer Service Design	Extensive media coverage and the impact that single use plastics is having on the environment result in customers expecting organisations to show commitment to reducing their usage of single use plastics.
Process Design	Our processes and the products we purchase which allow these processes to be put into practice need to fit in with the needs of our customers.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Equality & Human Rights Impact Assessment	EHRIA discussed and shared with Equalities Team
Privacy Impact Assessment	Not required
Duty of Due Regard / Fairer Scotland Duty	Not applicable

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 There are no background papers

10. APPENDICES

10.1 None

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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