

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Environment, Climate Change and Neighbourhood Scrutiny Committee - 10 October 2024

Subject: Single Use Plastics – Action Plan Update

Report of: Head of Integrated Commissioning and Procurement

Summary

Manchester City Council made a commitment in 2019 to eradicate avoidable single-use plastic (SUP) on the public estate, along with influencing to change behaviour across the city, by December 2024. Work has been done to develop and deliver an 'Avoidable Single Use Plastic Free Action Plan' and 'Single Use Plastics Policy'.

This report provides an update on work undertaken across the Council on its commitment on Single Use Plastics (SUPs), which is part of action within the Council's Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the information in the report.

Wards Affected: All Wards

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city	The Council's Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25 sets out the actions that will be delivered to ensure that the Council plays its full part in delivering the city's Climate Change Framework 2020-25
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments	Actions set out in the Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25 recognise the need for just and equal delivery of climate action across the city, focusing on the areas such as community engagement, accessible transport, access to green spaces and tackling fuel poverty.

Our Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the Our Manchester Strategy/Contribution to the Strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The transition to a zero-carbon city will help the city's economy become more sustainable and will generate jobs within the low carbon energy and goods sector. This will support the implementation of the Our Manchester Industrial Strategy and Manchester Economic Recovery and Investment Plan
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Manchester is one of a small number of UK cities that have agreed a science-based target and is leading the way in transitioning to a zero-carbon city. It is envisaged that this will give the city opportunities in the green technology and services sector.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Transitioning to a zero-carbon city can help to tackle fuel poverty by reducing energy bills. Health outcomes will also be improved through the promotion of more sustainable modes of transport, improved air quality and easy access to green spaces.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Becoming a zero-carbon city will help to make the city a more attractive place for people to live, work, visit and study.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	A zero-carbon transport system would create a world class business environment to drive sustainable economic growth.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

It is not expected that there will be any financial consequences to the Revenue budget that should arise from the content of this report.

Financial Consequences – Capital

It is not expected that there will be any financial consequences to the Capital budget that should arise from the content of this report.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy, please contact one of the contact officers above.

- *Manchester City Council Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25*
- *Manchester City Council Climate Emergency Declaration July 2019*
- *Manchester Climate Change Framework 2020-25 Updated 2022*
- *Manchester City Council: Progress to date on the Council's commitments on Single Use Plastics (SUPs) December 2022*
- *Manchester City Council: Avoidable Single Use Plastic Free by 2024: Action Plan – Report to the Executive Committee, December 2023.*

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update on progress on the Council's commitments on Single Use Plastics (SUPs) since the last report to this Committee in October 2023.
- 1.2 As we approach the end of 2024, proposed next steps to continue to build on the progress made, are outlined.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In 2019, Manchester City Council pledged to eradicate avoidable Single Use Plastics by 2024. This followed the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) launching the first city-region-wide plan to drive down avoidable SUPs as part of the #PlasticFreeGM campaign, in which all ten GM Local Authorities signed up to the Local Authorities Plastic Pact.
- 2.2 All ten GM local authorities, plus the GMCA, committed to actions related to reducing SUPs across five areas:
 - (i) aiming to eradicate avoidable single use plastic on the public estate;
 - (ii) sharing data, knowledge and best-practice on avoidable SUPs;
 - (iii) embedding environmental sustainability criteria in social value procurement mechanisms;
 - (iv) supporting new initiatives to increase recycling and re-use; and
 - (v) raising awareness amongst staff, suppliers and the wider community to influence and change behaviour.
- 2.3 Our commitment was reflected in the MCC Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25 (CCAP) under Workstream 3: Reducing Consumption Based Emissions and Influencing Suppliers:

Action 3.2: Ensuring the Council reduces avoidable SUPs by 2024 by reducing single use plastics from across the Council's operational estates (i.e. cafes), markets (including pop-up markets), Council run events and other events held on Council owned land and procurement (including packaging on goods).

Action 3.6: Ensure all MCC Markets and Parks meet the Council's Single Use Plastic Free Pledge and UK Government legislation by embedding and enforcing requirements to be single use plastic free within Market trader licences and Park trader licences.

- 2.4 A Greater Manchester Single-Use Plastic Working Group was established in December 2022. We have played an active role in the group with Manchester viewed as a leader on this work across GM.

3.0 Wider Context on Single Use Plastics

3.1 Single Use Plastic items are designed to be used once before being thrown away.

3.2 Plastic waste is problematic because:

- It contributes significantly to global pollution, as well as climate change (as plastics are made using fossil fuel).
- Items such as plastic bags can block waterways and sewers, leading to an increased risk of local flooding.
- It causes a major risk, sometimes fatal, to many marine species who mistake plastic objects for food and/or can become entangled in plastic waste.
- SUP items are often difficult to recycle, so often end up as landfill or burnable waste.
- Plastic waste as litter isn't biodegradable so will take hundreds of years to decompose into tiny pieces known as microplastics, potentially releasing embedded chemicals also. Microplastics have been found in our food and waterways. Most recent research has shown the presence of microplastics in human bodies.

3.3 The picture on single-use plastics is complex. It is not as straight forward as removing or replacing all SUPs, as for some there is no viable alternative.

3.4 Our pledge is to eradicate avoidable SUPs. Our definition of avoidable is where an item is non-essential or where there is a viable alternative, such as a reusable item. Currently, not all SUPs in use are avoidable. The agreed definition of unavoidable is where there is currently *no viable alternative*. This may be for health and safety reasons, cost implications, or for the avoidance of food waste (e.g. wrap on perishable products). Consideration for the environmental impacts of alternative materials is also given, including the weight, transportation (especially important for packaging), how much of an alternative material can be recycled, and how it is disposed of. Items classed as 'unavoidable' can vary in different contexts. Some examples of items that have been classed as unavoidable are:

- Single-use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including gloves
- Packaging, such as plastic wrap on adaptation equipment for people with disabilities.
- Cleaning products.

For products such as these, actions have focused on reduction or potential improvements to waste treatment rather than eradication.

4.0 National Legislation and Policy

4.1 The Department for Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) have taken action to tackle the most problematic littered SUPs. Plastic stirrers were banned by DEFRA, along with restrictions being placed on plastic straws and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in October 2020. A further ban came into place in October 2023

on plates, bowls, trays, containers, cutlery and balloon sticks (with some exemptions).

- 4.2 In August 2023, DEFRA published an updated Waste Prevention Programme, titled Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste for England. This sets out priorities for action to manage resources and waste in accordance with the top layers of the waste hierarchy – prevention and reuse, detailing actions for plastics (as well as construction, textiles, furniture, electronics, food and road vehicles). The previous report to this Committee outlined the key points related to planned plastics actions by the UK government including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), recycling and action on packaging. Plans for ‘Simpler Recycling’ were also announced by the previous government earlier this year.
- 4.3 Locally, in preparation for upcoming changes to recycling via kerbside collections, a working group has been established to work on the construction of a new Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) in Greater Manchester. The new facility will separate plastic pots, tubs and trays as well as plastic film from the comingled recycling collected in the brown bins. The new facility is expected to be operational by April 2026.

5.0 Progress Update

- 5.1 The previous report to Scrutiny in October 2023 set out next steps which are included below with a brief update on progress:

Action	Progress
SUP Action Plan to be agreed by the SUP Working Group (and passed for wider approval later).	Action Plan approved by Executive, December 2023 and progress in delivery outlined in this report.
Continued communications on recently banned SUP items.	Print and digital media communications, including a sustained social media campaign, letter to businesses and targeted leaflet distribution. See 5.8.
Continued actions to develop cross-organisational understanding of SUP reduction	This has been a core function of the SUP Working Group – see 5.8 below and the Appendix for an update on workforce engagement.
Further guidance to be included within the Sustainable Procurement Toolkit for staff that manage contracts, and in guidance for suppliers.	Ongoing. Toolkit due to be available by the start of 2025. See 5.8
Continued engagement of key external stakeholders and sharing of good practice and data with partners through GM networks and nationally as appropriate.	Communications and engagement approach developed. MCC taking an active role in the GM Single Use Plastics Working Group, chaired by GMCA, which includes all ten GM Local Authorities.

5.2 There has been dedicated resource in the MCC Zero Carbon Team and focussed effort through the MCC SUPs Working Group over the past two years to carry out focussed project work on the SUP commitment to:

- (i) evaluate good practice to date;
- (ii) identify challenge areas; and
- (iii) embed further good practice across the organisation as regards eradication (or reduction, if full eradication not viable) of avoidable SUPs. The overarching aims of the project were to better understand the organisation’s use of SUP and for SUP reduction to become standard practice across the organisation.

5.3 This was underpinned by the development and approval of a Single Use Plastics policy and action plan, outlining twenty objectives for the reduction of SUPs across the council, which was approved by the Council’s Executive Committee in December 2023 (the paper, policy and action plan is [here](#)).

5.4 The SUPs Action Plan is being implemented across the organisation, for example in engagement with suppliers as part of a procurement of goods or services; or communication with various organisations including schools, event organisers and partners. Delivery of the Action Plan will continue into future years.

5.5 The SUP Action Plan sets out objectives across six areas, along with two cross-cutting areas, which has allowed a focus on the overarching aim of ‘eliminating avoidable SUPs by 2024’. It has also helped with target setting and enabled good practice sharing between teams (who are trying to reduce the same type of SUP items):

Core Areas	Cross cutting
Office and operations Catering Markets Events Care (adults, children and homelessness) Construction	Communications and engagement Data analysis

5.6 The overarching approach agreed by the working group was to ensure that we fully embed SUP reduction practices in decision making across Council services, as well as fulfil our influencing and leadership role outside of the Council. The following graphic sets out the scale of influence for SUP reduction:



5.7 All Council Directorates are represented in the SUP Working Group, with Council officers from across services that use SUPs or have opportunity to influence SUPs usage across the Council or more widely in the city. In delivery of the action plan, work has been done across the organisation to ensure the Council is eradicating as much avoidable SUP as possible in its own operations and encouraging others to do the same. Progress has been made in each of the 6 core areas, as outlined in Appendix 1. Examples of key actions are:

- Procurement exercise carried out to secure café operators across six parks (six operators appointed, with three still to appoint) and of ice cream operators across ten parks (six operators appointed), with detailed requirements for SUP reduction in the tender specification. A Quality Assurance model is to be implemented, including mystery shoppers, which will ensure compliance.

A quote from the Parks team is included to illustrate how the SUP Action Plan and Working Group work has enabled change:

“As a result of our actions outlined in the SUP Action Plan, the Parks department are now in a much better position to challenge our café operators and contractors on Single Use Plastics. I have personally come to understand the plastic-free agenda with much more depth, and it has helped to cement the team’s understanding of our contribution to the Climate Change Action Plan as a whole. I am now focussed on developing a robust Quality Assurance model – including utilising ‘mystery shoppers’ - to ensure that our contractors and café operators remain complaint. We will also be rolling out additional training for the staff team”

Contracting & Performance Lead, Parks, Leisure & Events.

- Engagement between Facilities Management (FM) and their main cleaning-product supplier has taken place to investigate and switch to reduced SUP items. For example – a trial to avoid multiple one litre bottles by using reusable bottles and self-mix sachets saved more than 108kg of plastic in the first two months, as well as saving storage-space and not costing more. This will now be rolled out across the estate. By the end of the year, the FM team will have been able to understand the number of products switched to bulk / refillable products.

A quote from the Facilities Management team is included to illustrate how the SUP Action Plan and Working Group has enabled change:

“We were already buying products in bulk to save plastic, but we have recently made other changes to use dilutable sachets and refillable bottles, and it has worked well. Staff have been more than happy with the effectiveness of the product, they have found it simple to use, and they can see just how many plastic bottles it has saved us from buying and throwing away. It has also had the unexpected benefit of saving a large amount of storage space, and a lack of storage is always an issue for our team. We couldn’t be happier with this change; we are now working with our suppliers to make other swaps to sachets, and we are keen to share this success story with the rest of the organisation”

Principal Facilities Officer, FM.

- Work with events to reduce SUPs including:
 - ‘SUP Free Events’ guidance note produced and shared with event organisers to clarify best switches to make with reusable as best option, but other disposables then prioritised over throwaway plastic cups.
 - Communication taken place with all Parks and city centre commercial event organisers to advise that SUP cups will not be permitted after the end of 2024.
 - Water refill points promoted or installed at key events organised or funded by MCC.
 - The Council’s Premises Licencing Policy now contains reference to ‘no avoidable SUPs’ to encourage less waste in licensed venues. Communication sent to all licensed premises to advise of this change in policy.
- Work with suppliers and contracting and commissioning staff: The IC&P unit has a forward plan of upcoming procurement activity. This plan will be used to identify and prioritise opportunities for future reduction in avoidable SUPs, working with service units, to ensure that achievable targets are set in contracts, aligned to SUP Policy and that achievement against these targets is monitored over the life of the new contract.
- Further guidance is to be included within the Sustainable Procurement Toolkit for staff that manage contracts, due to be available by the start of 2025. This will also be a feature of the training available to Procurement staff, commissioners and contracts managers.
- New procurement regulations will come into effect in February 2025 and guidance and documentation for inclusion in tenders is to be developed before then. This will include requirements to eradicate avoidable SUPs as per policy so will incorporate guidance for suppliers to help them provide relevant responses including how to develop and implement action plans that are appropriate to the service / goods being procured with achievable targets.

5.8 Communication & Engagement

We have continued to communicate the need to reduce avoidable single use plastics, both internally with staff, and outside of the Council with residents, businesses and partner organisations, to influence reduced use of SUPs within the Council and the wider city. MCC is also taking an active role in the GM Single Use Plastics Working Group, chaired by GMCA, which includes all ten GM Local Authorities. A key role for the group is to share information and good practice on SUP reduction covered by legislation.

Achievements in the last year have been wide ranging across communicating on legislation, along with internal and external communications as set out below.

Bans in Legislation

We continue to share messaging around the national bans. A communications plan was implemented by MCC around the SUPs bans in October 2023, utilising both print and digital media, including a sustained social media campaign, letter to businesses, and targeted leaflet distribution

Internal communication

- Dedicated SUPs reduction landing page on the MCC staff intranet created.
- Plastic Free July campaign.
- SUPs added to Carbon Literacy training
- Identification of areas where colleagues needed tools and knowledge to reduce SUP usage on an ongoing basis, such as catering and cafes. Tools created and shared, so staff understand the right products to use.

External Communication

- Webinar delivered to 93 Voluntary, Community, Faith & Social Enterprise (VCFSE) and Cultural organisations in Manchester
- Communication with 29 venues used by the Council for its own events, to clarify SUPs requirements. This has also been used by the Culture team in communicating with venues across the city
- Social media campaigns around World Refill Day (16th June) & Plastic Free July
- Tools developed to engage stakeholders including 'Events and SUPs', 'SUP free Catering & Cafes' and 'Markets Cups free loan scheme' guides

The communications and engagement approach we have developed can now be used on an ongoing basis. We have taken an approach to go beyond communicating on items banned in legislation promoting wider best practice

and supporting behaviour change. Through our engagement with the Refill campaign since June 2023, we have focussed on hot and cold drinks cups and water bottles.

5.9 Manchester: Refill Destination

In June 2024, the Council signed up for a further year to the Refill campaign, following a successful pilot year in 2023/24. Achievements in the first year include:



- 28% increase in Refill stations added to the Refill app since June 2023.
- Refill app users increased by 35%.
- 36 more buildings on the council estate added to the Refill app, including libraries and leisure centres where Refill messaging is shared and displayed.
- Supported the development of the Manchester 'Bee Cup' Returnable Cup scheme in September 2024, across the University of Manchester campus and four independent cafes around Oxford Road.
- Refill added to Climate Change Ward Plans across the city
- Promoted water fountains for privately owned public space operators
- Onboarding of two Refill Communities - community groups committed to promoting Refill - in Didsbury East and Ardwick.
- 4 Manchester schools participating in Pupil's Profit School Eco Refill Shop pilot to promote refill and re-use in the local community.

5.10 Our Response to Plastic Free GM Pact

In response to the five commitments of the Greater Manchester Plastic Free Pact (showing leadership; sharing knowledge and insights; procurement; supporting new initiatives; and communications and engagement), we have made significant progress in all areas and continue to share good practice, insights and practical tools with the GM working group. The focus for the GM group has been primarily on communications and engagement (within Local Authorities and with residents) and reducing SUPs associated with catering, or food and drink in general. The detailed information from GM on catering products has been very helpful. We can now confidently say we have eradicated avoidable single use plastics used in catering (cafes and kitchens) in Council buildings and that the procurement mechanisms are now in place to challenge any incidents of avoidable SUP use by our suppliers.

- 5.11 Catering is one of the six objectives in the MCC SUP Action Plan. Whilst there has been progress against all six objectives, along with communications and engagement to drive behaviour change, the other five objectives are not yet fully achieved, and action needs to continue to be embedded. We are in a strong position to continue to deliver action against all objectives throughout the remainder of the CCAP 2020-25, along with embedding further action in the next CCAP 2025-30 (as outlined below at 7.4)

6.0 Challenges

6.1 The organisation needs to ensure this is an ongoing 'business as usual' consideration for those procuring goods and services and, because of the complexity and breadth of this area of work, this is challenging for several reasons:

- Data integrity is poor as the finance system has not been set up to provide the granular detail necessary to drill down into contracts where SUPs are just one item in a range of items provided by a specific supplier.
- Data can be more complex than expected. For example, looking at SUP gloves, a unit of 1 may mean 1 box of 100 gloves.
- There are additional complexities such as the SUP packaging on other non-SUP items, therefore analysis of purchase ledger data is not helpful. Showing success in numbers is therefore not always possible.
- Scoping of data availability has shown this to be resource intensive and the assumptions that have to be applied undermine the integrity of the data.

6.2 For these reasons it is challenging to benchmark and monitor actual SUP usage and to track reduction in numbers.

6.3 Going forward, it is important to engage with suppliers continuously on the options available when considering how to reduce SUPs or items with SUP packaging. This needs to be built into contracts where possible.

7.0 Next Steps

7.1 The dedicated project work led by the SUP Working Group and supported by the Zero Carbon Team has enabled all directorates to review and understand SUP usage and embed activity to reduce. Council services now have tools and further knowledge to continue to reduce avoidable SUPs. Whilst some actions can now be considered embedded into 'business as usual', others require ongoing work beyond the end of 2024. For some areas, an immediate solution is not always possible and may need to wait for contracts to come to an end or the right products to be available in the wider market.

7.2 Beyond the end of 2024, continued reduction as part of sustainable procurement will continue. Procurement exercises for large tenders, or where use of avoidable SUPs is part of service delivery, will continue to include 'no avoidable SUPs' as part of specification, with key performance indicators set and monitored throughout the lifetime of the contract.

7.3 Workforce engagement continues through ongoing and regular communications on the need to consider use of resources and reduction in waste. In addition, the roll out of guidance and training for Procurement staff, commissioners and contracts managers will ensure this remains a top priority.

7.4 As the dedicated project work on SUPs comes to an end in 2024/25, consideration for how to maintain momentum in continuing to reduce SUPs needs to be addressed in development of the CCAP 2025-30. One option

could be to consider this in the context of transitioning to a circular economy, reducing waste through reduction in single use items, increasing reuse, increasing consumption of recycled materials. An update on the development of the CCAP 2025-30 will be brought to this Committee in January 2025.

8.0 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: SUP Action Plan – Progress Report October 2024