

Report to	Cabinet
Date of meeting	15 March 2022
Chair of Scrutiny	Councillor Arwel Roberts, Chair of Performance Scrutiny Committee
Report author	Rhian Evans, Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Title	Eradication of Non-Recyclable Goods in School Catering Services

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. An aim to eliminate the use of non-recyclable goods in School Catering Services with a view to supporting the Council's ambition of becoming Net Carbon Zero and Ecologically Positive by 2030.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To formally present a recommendation from Performance Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet.
- 2.2 To seek Cabinet to lobby Welsh Government to provide sufficient financial support to local authorities to help them eliminate the use of non-recyclable goods and facilitate carbon reduction measures in School Catering Services, without compromising their ability to deliver a viable and sustainable school meals service.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Cabinet on behalf of the Council writes to the Welsh Government seeking it to –

- 3.1 work with local authorities across Wales in a bid to reduce and eradicate the practice of using single use plastics and non-recyclable goods in the supply, preparation and serving of school meals, and

- 3.2 provide sufficient financial resources to all local authorities to enable them to realise the above objectives and facilitate carbon reduction measures within their School Catering Services whilst securing the delivery of a sustainable school meals service.

4. Report details

Background

- 4.1 County Council in July 2018 in response to a Notice of Motion resolved to support the principle that the Authority reduced its use of plastics. With a view to progressing this objective a members Task and Finish Group was established. That Task and Finish Group reported its findings to Performance Scrutiny Committee, who in turn presented its recommendations to County Council in January 2020.
- 4.2 County Council on 28 January 2020 approved the Task and Finish Group's recommendations for reducing the use of plastics in Council offices. It also supported the Task and Finish Group's request to continue its work for a further 12 months with a view to developing proposals for further actions to reduce the Council's use of plastic in the areas of school catering and procurement.
- 4.3 Within weeks of the above decision being taken the COVID-19 pandemic struck and schools were closed for an extended period of time for the majority of pupils. During the lockdown periods and upon re-opening the Schools Catering Service was required to put in place additional food safety measures in order to minimise the risk of infection when serving food to the county's pupils. Unfortunately, this could only be achieved by using single-use plastic containers etc. It soon became clear that the Task and Finish Group could not deliver the second phase of its work within the timescale it had been given. Performance Scrutiny Committee in December 2020 and subsequently County Council on 23 February 2021 agreed that:
"...any future work on the avoidance and reduction of plastics in Denbighshire County Council... be co-ordinated under the proposed Climate and Ecological Change Strategy..."

Current position

- 4.4 With schools now having resumed some semblance of normality the Climate and Ecological Change Working Group requested Scrutiny to examine whether the

Council's School Catering Service was making progress on lowering its carbon footprint and reducing its usage and dependency on single use plastics.

- 4.5 Consequently, Performance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 27 January 2022 considered a report on 'Reduction of single use plastics and carbon reduction in the School Meals Service'. A copy of that report is attached at Appendix 1 for information.
- 4.6 Representatives from Ysgol Dinas Bran, Llangollen requested to address the Committee during the above meeting and ask questions on this topic. Ysgol Dinas Bran has taken a keen interest in climate change and environmental matters over a number of years and has itself introduced a number of innovative measures to try and combat the effects of climate change.
- 4.7 The school's representatives constructively contributed towards the discussion and members' valued their input and passion for the subject under discussion. Attached at Appendix 2 is the draft minute of the discussion. From reading the draft minutes or viewing the [webcast](#) of the proceedings the depth of feeling and passion for the subject is evident, as is the need for urgent action to address the matter.
- 4.8 During the course of the discussion Scrutiny Committee members recognised the challenges faced in terms of balancing the needs of the School Catering Service and school meal provision against climate and ecological priorities, not least the financial implications and necessary behaviour changes to meet those ambitions. The pilot undertaken at Ysgol Glan Clwyd (see paragraphs 4.3 to 4.7 of Appendix 1) clearly illustrates these challenges.
- 4.9 Having regard to the additional pressures the new requirement to offer a free school meal to all primary school pupils from September 2023 onwards will have on all local authorities, along with the national and global commitment given to addressing climate change, the Committee felt that the Council should lobby the Welsh Government seeking it to work with local authorities across Wales to address these matters and provide the necessary funding to effect a step change, particularly given the financial challenges already facing local government and pressures across schools and other service areas. Hence the presentation of this report to Cabinet.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1. The recommendations contained within this report support the delivery of the Council's environment corporate priority. It would also have a positive impact on the Council's ambition to become Net Carbon Zero and Ecologically Positive by 2030.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. There are no cost implications associated with the recommendations made in this report. However, the cost and budgetary implications for the Council of ceasing the current practice of selling drinks in schools and implementing other 'environmentally friendly' practices are outlined in the report presented to Performance Scrutiny Committee (see Appendix 1).

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1. Not applicable at this stage as this report only seeks Cabinet's support for the principle of a financial and ecological school meals service and to write to WG to seek sufficient funding to help it and other authorities realise this ambition.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1. The recommendations included in this report are the direct result of Performance Scrutiny Committee's discussion and deliberations on the subject of 'Reduction of single use plastics and carbon reduction in the School Meals Service' and the contributions of student representatives from Ysgol Dinas Bran, Llangollen to that discussion.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 The proposed approach to lobby Welsh Government to provide sufficient financial support to local authorities to help them eliminate the use of non-recyclable goods and facilitate carbon reduction measures in School Catering Services is fully supported. Any additional budget implications for DCC would need to go through the agreed annual budget process.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. The risks associated with the future financial sustainability and the potential increase in the Schools Catering Service's carbon footprint due to the expansion of the free school meals offer to all primary school pupils is outlined in paragraph 10 of the report attached at Appendix 1.

10.2. The lack of availability of sufficient funding to meet the additional costs associated with the new legislative requirements and to support the Service to provide school meals and drinks in non-disposable re-useable containers can hinder the Council's aim of becoming Net Carbon Zero and Ecologically Positive by 2030, which could damage its reputation.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

11.2. Sections 7.4.2(d), 7.20 and 7.21 of the Council's Constitution.