



Single Use Plastics Policy

*A step towards a
sustainable future*

**Sandwell Metropolitan
Borough Council –
November 2023**

**Next Review: November
2024**



**Bostin' People,
Bostin' Place**

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Introduction

This policy document provides the approach that Sandwell MBC will take towards the removal of single use plastics (SUPs) in its operations. Sandwell MBC are strongly committed to reducing the environmental impacts of our operations and reducing our carbon footprint. This policy will support the commitments laid out in our [Climate Change Strategy](#)

Background

Defra has estimated the UK uses around 2.7 billion items of single use cutlery, mostly plastic, a year, and 721 million single use plates. Plastic pollution does not break down like other waste and can take decades or even centuries to decompose, leading to a mounting problem that ends up in our streets, waterways, and natural environments. This is causing lasting damage to both human and animal life and there is increasing concern over the volume of microplastics that are present in our water supplies and foods. Coupled with the release of greenhouse gas from their production, manufacture and final disposal, the use of plastic is one of the most significant environmental issues of our time.

The Government has introduced a ban on a range of SUPs from October 2023. The ban will include single-use plastic plates, trays, bowls, cutlery, balloon sticks, and certain types of polystyrene cups and food containers, although there are exemptions outlined in the [Government guidance](#) and in certain circumstances they may still be used.

What are single use plastics

'Single use plastics' are items that are meant to be used only once for their original purpose and the ban includes all types of single-use plastic, including biodegradable, compostable and recycled. It also includes items wholly or partly made from plastic, including coating or lining.

This can include items such as plastic bags, coffee pods and drinks bottles in addition to the items being restricted under the government regulation.

The law

By law, from 1st October 2023 businesses can no longer supply, sell or offer certain single-use plastic items in England. The council Trading Standards team will be required to enforce the ban. Trading Standards will work with local businesses to ensure they comply with the law and act responsibly. Where advice has been given and is not being adhered to, Trading Standards, in accordance with their enforcement policy may take the necessary enforcement action which could include a fine of £200, or ultimately a criminal prosecution.

The ban covers a wide range of single-use items including plastic cutlery, plates, bowls, balloon sticks and certain styles of polystyrene cup and food containers that are used to supply ready-to-eat food.

The Environmental Protection (Plastic Straws, Cotton Buds and Stirrers) (England) Regulations 2020 prohibit the supply, or offering to supply, of any single-use plastic straw, plastic stemmed cotton bud or plastic drink stirrer in England.

The Environmental Protection (Plastic Plates etc and Polystyrene Containers etc) (England) Regulations 2023 prohibit the supply, or offering to supply, of any single-use plastic plates, bowls, trays, cutlery and balloon sticks, or polystyrene cups, food and drink containers in England.

There are a number of exceptions to the prohibitions. For straws and cotton buds, these exceptions allow for situations where the items may be required due to disability or accessibility issues. Plastic plates, bowls and trays are permitted when supplied to other businesses or where the item is packaging. Polystyrene cups, food and drink containers are permitted where the food is not ready to be consumed and requires further preparation, such as adding water or heating.

The following supplies of single-use plastic straws are permitted:

- From a registered pharmacy, but products must not be displayed or advertised in store.
- From a catering establishment (pubs, clubs, restaurants, canteens, etc) where supplied for immediate consumption of food or drink. They must only be supplied if requested and not made available for customers to help themselves. They cannot be offered either verbally or in writing.
- For use as a medical device or for a medical purpose. This includes preventative medicine, medical diagnosis, research, and care and treatment.
- For use as packaging for a product - for example, certain medicines. This does not exempt drinking straws supplied with drinks cartons.
- For use in care homes, prisons, schools and early years provision, but alternatives should be sought where possible.

The following supplies of plastic cotton buds are permitted:

- For use as a medical device or for a medical purpose. This includes preventative medicine, medical diagnosis, research, and care and treatment.
- For forensic purposes: use by forensic service providers.
- For scientific purposes: diagnostic, education and research.

More information on the ban: <https://www.businesscompanion.info/en/quick-guides/miscellaneous/single-use-plastics>

Our Commitments

In line with our Climate Change Strategy, Sandwell Council has set out a series of actions to help reduce the volume of single use plastic we consume as part of our operations in addition to those required under the Government ban. We will work to embed these actions into our key strategies, policies and plans. In line with this we commit to:

- Ensure all council operations, including maintained schools, are compliant with the government 'single-use plastics ban' on plates, bowls, trays, containers, cutlery and balloon sticks'.
- Identify areas where exemptions to the single use plastics ban apply and use alternate, less harmful options, where available.
- Review what we purchase to identify opportunities to reduce SUP waste
- Prevent the use of plastic drinks bottles where alternate, less damaging options are available.
- Work with staff to achieve the elimination of single use plastics from our offices.
- Relevant procurement exercises will use Government regulation to ensure compliance with the ban on SUPs and also to support locally sourced alternatives to SUPs
- Work with external commercial event organisers to ensure no avoidable SUPs are used on Sandwell Council owned land from November 2023.
- Work with community group event organisers to ensure the likelihood of use of avoidable single use plastics on Council owned land is minimised in 2024 with an aim to completely eradicate their use by 2025.
- Work with external suppliers and concessions at council run events and premises to ensure use of avoidable SUPs is eradicated by November 2023.
- Raise awareness within our schools and communities around best practice and less obvious use of plastics such as coffee cup linings and support them in eliminating the use of plastics in their buildings.
- Improve systems for waste disposal within the corporate estate to support the elimination of all avoidable single use plastics and increase recycling rates.
- Use the Council's website and communications to share information on reducing the use of plastics with our residents, communities and businesses.
- It is acknowledged that staff or students may bring their own single use plastics onto a site. We will work to raise awareness of the harm caused by SUPs and encourage the use of more sustainable options.

Implementation and monitoring

To ensure the effective implementation of the policy and to enable us to monitor progress, identify barriers and learn from best practice we will:

- Benchmark the current use of SUPs in corporate operations and schools that are affected by the ban.

- Identify areas of additional support required in achieving SUP ban compliance. Identify areas within corporate operations, events and schools where exemptions on SUP ban apply.
- Develop cross directorate support and work with the Climate Change champions to identify areas where SUPs are in use, barriers to their removal and alternative options.
- Work with Serco to improve understanding, awareness and monitoring of recycling practices.
- Report progress against delivery of this policy to the Climate Change Programme Board and Climate Change Member Steering Group.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.