

Introducing market restrictions on problematic single-use plastic items in Scotland

Fairer Scotland Duty Summary

November 2021

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Title of Policy, Strategy, Programme etc.

Introducing market restrictions on problematic single-use plastic items in Scotland

Summary of aims and expected outcomes of strategy, proposal, programme or policy

The policy is for a market restriction on single-use plastic (SUP) items. These are based on those identified within Article 5 of the EU Directive (EU) 2019/904 (SUP Directive). The following items are included:

- Single-use plastic cutlery (forks, knives, spoons, chopsticks);
- Single-use plastic plates;
- Single-use plastic straws;
- Single-use plastic beverage stirrers;
- Single-use plastic balloon sticks;
- Single-use food containers made of expanded polystyrene (EPS); and
- Single-use cups and other beverage containers made of EPS, including their covers and lids.

The introduction of market restrictions is part of a package of measures being taken forward by Scottish ministers to address marine litter and support a shift away from our throwaway culture to a more circular economy.

Summary of evidence

There is little evidence of existing inequalities of outcome in relation to single-use plastics. However, three areas of interest have been identified.

Living costs

There is the potential for people on low incomes to be disproportionately affected if the costs of alternative single-use or reusable items are significantly higher than the single-use plastic/Expanded Polystyrene items. However:

- According to previous research, the likely single-use alternatives were usually only slightly more expensive than the single-use plastic/EPS items (with a difference in the range of zero to ten pence per item)
- Comparing the price of single-use plastic/EPS items and their reusable alternatives was not possible

- There is limited data about the impact of a ban on the price of the single-use plastic/EPS items. However, prices appear to have fallen following the English ban on single-use plastic straws, drink stirrers and cotton buds.
- The price of single-use alternatives is unlikely to rise following a ban on the single-use plastic/EPS items, and may fall in some cases.
- The price of reusable alternatives appears to have fallen following the English ban on single-use plastic straws, drink stirrers and cotton buds.
- Budget retailers may be more willing to absorb additional costs, so cost pass-through may be less likely to affect those on low incomes.
- There is a risk that food and drink outlets catering to people on lower budgets may raise their prices more than those catering to people on higher budgets. However, in most cases, the additional cost involved is likely to be marginal. Businesses may also be able to reduce their use of all single-use items, reducing or eliminating the additional cost.
- The per-unit cost increase may be more noticeable for alternatives to EPS food containers, and these may be harder to avoid
- Any price increases are likely to be mitigated somewhat by the downward trend in the prices of alternative items (single-use and reusable).

Straws

A market restriction would be expected to significantly reduce demand for plastic straws. It is currently unclear what impact this will have on prices in the long-term, but the research commissioned on product pricing showed that in the wake of the implementation of a market restriction on single-use plastic straws in England, the average price of these straws dropped noticeably, by around 40%.

The potential impact of a market restriction on plastic straws for disabled people is explored in the Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA). The findings in the EQIA included:

Potential negative impacts have been identified related to disability, and age when coupled with disability. However,

- The policy includes specific exemptions around single-use plastic straws, recognising that they perform a vital function which cannot be easily replaced with a more sustainable alternative or provide crucial quality of life enhancing functions for disabled people.
- Therefore access to these straws will be restricted to certain types of premises.
- Catering establishments and retail pharmacy businesses supplying single-use plastic straws will make them available on request only, and will comply with requirements to store out of sight.
- There are also exemptions for use for medical purposes and medical devices, for packaging, and where straws are used as part of a support service.

Litter

By reducing the usage of single-use plastics, it is anticipated that this policy will reduce the prevalence of littering of these items. As those living in the 20% most deprived areas were more likely to report neighbourhood problems, this may be beneficial.

In addition, stakeholder conversations suggested that a market restriction would, in some cases, incentivise businesses to find ways to reduce the use of single-use alternatives, in order to avoid the additional cost they entail. This implies that the policy change may reduce littering of single-use items (in these product categories) more generally.

Summary of assessment findings

Alternatives to the single-use plastic items in scope of this policy tend to be marginally more expensive, which could marginally increase costs for those that use these items. However, as the change per item is generally of the order of a few pennies, any impact is expected to be small.

The Scottish Government has committed to implementing Article 10 of the SUP Directive which focuses on raising awareness about reusable alternatives, reuse systems and waste management options, the impact of littering and other inappropriate disposal on the environment and the sewer network. This is intended to reduce the demand for single-use items altogether, not just those made of plastic, and would help consumers to avoid the cost of purchasing these items in the first place.

Evidence indicates that families that include a disabled person are more likely to be living in relative poverty. Targeted exemptions on the market restrictions are included for single-use plastic straws to ensure that access is protected for those who need them for medical use or to support independent living.

No changes to the Regulations were proposed as a result of this impact assessment work because the potential costs increases from this policy are expected to be minor.

Sign off

Name: Aidan Grisewood

Job title: Deputy Director, Environmental Quality and Circular Economy

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "A. Grisewood". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.



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