

Single-Use Disposable Beverage Cups Charge:

Fairer Scotland Duty Summary

August 2024

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Summary of aims and expected outcomes

A priority in a more circular economy is to avoid unnecessary waste and use fewer resources. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the use of single-use disposable beverage cups, and it is estimated that 388.7 million single-use disposable beverage cups were placed on the market in Scotland in 2021-22. This equates to 71 single-use disposable beverage cups per capita per year, one of the highest compared to nations in the European Union¹. Within this report it is estimated that around 62% of cups were used for hot beverages and 38% were used for cold beverages.

The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill, passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament in June 2024, gives Scottish Ministers new powers to require suppliers of single-use items to charge a minimum amount for such items, through the introduction of a new section 87A into the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009², with the policy aim of reducing consumption and therefore reducing the environmental harm caused³. The Scottish Government intends that an early use of such powers will be to introduce a minimum charge on single-use disposable beverage cups. This is in line with our draft Circular Economy and Waste Route Map which includes 'reduce and reuse' as one of the four strategic aims, with a commitment to introduce a charge on single-use disposable beverage cups by the end of 2025.

This summary report is published alongside a consultation document setting out our proposals for how a minimum charge on single-use beverage cups would look. In that document we propose that:

- a charge of at least 25p should apply to all single-use beverage cup when an individual buys a drink of any kind, to maximise coverage and ensure the charge is easily understood;
- the charge will apply regardless of cup material, and therefore would include cups made of biodegradable material or bio-based plastics. While it can be argued that these are more sustainable than traditional plastics, they are still single use and present their own sustainability challenges including a lack of recycling infrastructure and frequency of littering;
- that there will be a limited number of exemptions based on purpose or setting, for instance in schools and when a drink is bought from a vending machine;
- retailers should be able to retain reasonable implementation costs from the charge, in line with the approach taken for the single use carrier bags charge; and
- that net proceeds of the charge should be used for the advancement of environmental protection or improvement, or to any other purposes that may be reasonably regarded as analogous.

This approach aligns with the Scottish Government's commitment to keep pace with

¹ [Consumption of Single-use Disposable Beverage Cups in Scotland, Zero Waste Scotland, 2022](#)

² [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [Circular Economy \(Scotland\) Bill](#)

or exceed the EU Directive on single-use plastics (Single-Use Plastics (SUP) Directive - Directive (EU) 2019/904) where able to do so and in a manner that contributes towards maintaining and advancing standards⁴. Article 4 (consumption reduction) of the Directive requires necessary measures to be taken to achieve an ambitious and sustained reduction in the consumption of single-use plastic cups for beverages and food containers. Under the Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products)(Scotland) Regulations 2021 a ban on some of the most problematic items, including single-use cups made of expanded polystyrene (EPS), came into force in Scotland in June 2022.

To support the development of a single-use disposable beverage cups charge the Scottish Government established the Single-Use Disposable Cups Charge Advisory Group to provide advice and expertise on development of a minimum charge on single-use disposable beverage cups⁵. Scottish Government has also undertaken further stakeholder engagement to gain more insight into key issues and, through Zero Waste Scotland, commissioned a research paper 'Consumption of Single-use Disposable Beverage Cups in Scotland'. The paper was published in June 2023 and examines single-use disposable beverage cup usage in Scotland, potential impact of a charge, as well as international examples of alternative reusable cup schemes.

Scottish Government's commitment to introduce a charge builds on the work of the Expert Panel on Environmental Charging and Other Measures (EPECOM) which reported on single-use beverage cups in 2019⁶. The panel concluded that:

"Environmental charges, notably price-based interventions, have been shown to be effective at reducing consumption and should be considered in tandem with other preventative measures. The Panel believes that a charge is more effective at reducing consumption and increasing reusable cup use than a ... cup discount"⁷.

Loss aversion theory shows individuals have a higher sensitivity to potential losses than to gains⁸. This would mean charging for products has a stronger impact on behaviour change than offering a discount.

The planned charge can be avoided by bringing a reusable cup or in some cases 'sitting-in' at the supplier and using provided reusable crockery (i.e. glass or mug). The policy intention is that the charge will only be applicable where a drink is purchased, there it will not apply if a drink is free. There will be circumstances in which the charge would apply but where an exemption is appropriate, for instance in schools, for vending machines and other settings where there is no option to use a reusable cup.

These exemptions are explained in the consultation document and will be kept in review during final policy development. A final impact assessment will be published alongside any regulations.

⁴ [Directive \(EU\) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment \(Text with EEA relevance\), European Union, 2019](#)

⁵ [Single-Use Disposable Cups Charge Advisory Group, Scottish Government](#)

⁶ [Environmental charging and other measures: expert panel, Scottish Government](#)

⁷ [Single-use disposable cups: EPECOM recommendations, Scottish Government, 2019](#)

⁸ [How Incentive Framing Can Harness the Power of Social Norms. Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, Lieberman, A., Duke, K., & Amir., O., 2019](#)

Policy objectives and intended outcomes

The Scottish Government proposes to make regulations requiring suppliers of beverages in single-use disposable beverage cups to charge a minimum amount for such cups. The policy aim is to reduce consumption of single-use disposable beverage cups, and reduce the environmental harm caused. This will support the overall ambition to tackle our throwaway culture by avoiding unnecessary waste and using fewer resources. This aligns with a wider ambition to promote reusable alternatives as part of the shift towards a circular economy in Scotland.

Summary of evidence

A charge on single-use disposable beverage cups has the potential to impact upon everybody in Scotland who purchases a hot or cold beverage in a single-use disposable beverage cup. The proposed charge is intended to apply across Scotland and does not specifically target particular groups, geographical locations or sections of society. It is, however, important to ensure that the impact on those who experience socio-economic disadvantage is understood, whether this is through low income, low wealth, material deprivation, area deprivation or socio-economic background.

At this stage, after an initial assessment, the evidence suggests the following potential impacts are relevant:

Low incomes, low wealth and material deprivation

Over one million people in Scotland live in relative poverty and around a quarter of them are children, with nearly half a million people living in very deep poverty⁹. In 2022, 51.9% (362,121) of all school pupils were registered for free school meals with 215,053 pupils registered and present taking free meals. It is noted that these figures also cover primary and special schools where a substantial proportion of those registered qualify through non-benefits based criteria.

An estimated 388.7 million single-use cups were placed on the market in Scotland in 2021-22, which equates to 71 single-use cups per capita per year⁸. Noted within this report, 62% of these single-use cups are the result of hot drink consumption, the remaining 38% from cold beverage consumption.

Those aged between 24-41 and those aged 42-58 are more likely to consume takeaway coffees once a week or more. This is contrasted to those 18-24 and 58+ who are more likely to never purchase takeaway coffees¹⁰. This would indicate that those aged 24-58 might be most affected by the charge. However, the above data is related to coffee only and does not consider the wide array of circumstances where single-use disposable beverage cups may be used.

⁹ [Poverty in Scotland 2023, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023](#)

¹⁰ [Frequency of coffee consumption from takeaway and at cafes in the United Kingdom in 2021, by generation, Statista](#)

Furthermore, it does not provide insight into how the rate of consumption varies across the different age groups in relation to different income brackets.

According to the 2022 household survey, 11% of those aged 16-34 and 12% of 35-59 years old said they are not managing well financially¹¹. These low-income groups have the potential to be adversely impacted by a charge. However, this charge is avoidable by using a reusable cup. The accessibility of reusable cups for lower income households is not known or the proportion of people in these households who currently have access to them but these items vary in price and are available in most major supermarkets and online. The lifecycle, and therefore value for money, of these items will vary. We will be seeking views from representative groups during the consultation to understand this.

Homelessness

In Scotland, there were 39,006 homelessness applications recorded in 2022-23¹². From April to September 2022, 1,184 homeless applicants reported rough sleeping during the previous three months (6% of all applications)¹³. Those experiencing homelessness may rely on takeaway drinks and may have limited access to reusable cups and facilities to keep them clean. It is unclear at this time the number of charitable drinks given, the reliance those experiencing homelessness have on takeaway drinks, and if a charge would impact on members of the public giving charitable donations of drinks.

Per above, policy proposals include that free drinks will not be subject to the charge. Further engagement will be carried out during the consultation period to understand the potential impact on those experiencing homelessness and the impact of mitigating action of exempting free drinks.

Rural Communities

A Scottish Government report from 2021 estimated that the minimum cost of living in 'remote rural' Scotland is between 15% and 30% higher than urban parts of the UK¹⁴. While living in more rural areas in Scotland incurs additional costs, it is unclear how people living in these areas would be impacted by a charge on single-use disposable beverage cups. We will therefore undertake further engagement with representative groups during the consultation to understand this better.

Potential positive impacts of reduced littering

There may be mental health benefits arising from the anticipated reduction in littered cups. In the Scottish Household Survey, 2022, those living in the 20% most deprived areas were more likely to say neighbourhood problems (such as litter and graffiti)

¹¹ [Scottish Household Survey 2022: Key Findings, Scottish Government, 2023](#)

¹² [Going under and without: JRF's cost of living tracker, winter 2022/23, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2022](#)

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ [The Cost of Remoteness: Reflecting higher living costs in remote rural Scotland when measuring fuel poverty, Scottish Government, 2021](#)

were 'common' than those in the least deprived areas (72% compared with 39%)¹⁵. This was further supported by the Scottish Litter Survey in 2023. 52% of those surveyed reported frequently seeing single-use (hot and cold) drinks containers in their local area¹⁶.

The Carnegie Trust also found that those who reported the highest incidence of environmental incivilities such as litter were more likely to report anxiety, depression, poor health, smoking, and poor exercise than those with more positive views on this aspect of their local environment¹⁷. Another study¹⁸ investigated the effect of litter on psychological reactions to marine environments. The study found that photographs of un-littered coasts tended to provide participants with a sense of happiness and less stress while photographs exhibiting littered coasts caused participants to exhibit stress and a lack of the positive psychological benefits that coastal environments normally provide.

Summary of assessment findings

A charge on single-use disposable beverage cups has the potential to impact upon everybody in Scotland who purchases a hot or cold beverage in a single-use disposable beverage cup. The proposed charge is intended to apply across Scotland and does not specifically target particular groups, geographical locations or sections of society. This interim assessment has not identified any definitive impacts on those who experience socio-economic disadvantage. However, it has identified potential issues that should be explored further during the consultation.

A better understanding is needed about the proportionality of the potential impacts identified above so that the Scottish Government can pay due regard to the scale of socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in relation to this proposed policy. This would also include the mechanism for avoiding the charge by using a reusable cup. The accessibility of this for lower income households is not known.

A key evidence gap identified is the use of single use-disposable beverage cups by individuals experiencing homelessness. Other evidence gaps may exist around the following:

- level and pattern of use of single-use disposable beverage cups in different income brackets, particularly low-income groups;
- the proportion of litter that is made up of single-use disposable beverage cups across areas of different levels of deprivation;
- the rate of consumption of beverages purchased in single-use disposable beverage cups across different income brackets;
- data relating to young adult (secondary school age under 18) consumption of hot and cold beverages purchased in single-use disposable beverage cups; and

¹⁵ [Scottish Household Survey 2022: Key Findings, Scottish Government, 2023](#)

¹⁶ [Scottish Litter Survey: Tracking public perceptions and attitudes towards litter, Keep Scotland Beautiful, 2023](#)

¹⁷ [Pride in Place: Tackling Incivilities, Carnegie Trust UK, 2012](#)

¹⁸ [Factors That Can Undermine the Psychological Benefits of Coastal Environments: Exploring the Effect of Tidal State, Presence, and Type of Litter, Wyles et al., 2016](#)

- the accessibility of reuseable cups to avoid the charge and the return of investment on these.

We aim to engage with different groups of stakeholders at the consultation stage to understand any potential impacts of proposals on those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage across Scotland.

Decision

What changes, if any, will be made to the proposal as a result of the assessment?
Why are these changes being made and what are the expected outcomes?

This section will be completed after the consultation period.

Sign off

Name:

Job title:



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