

Removing Disposable Cups for Hot Drinks from Scottish Government Buildings

Scottish Government Case Study

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EXPERT PANEL ON ENVIRONMENTAL CHARGES AND OTHER MEASURES

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(Prepared by SG Facilities Services team and Panel Secretariat)

Background

During early 2018 there was an increased focus on single-use plastics, largely as a result of David Attenborough's Blue Planet II, and in particular the use and environmental impact of disposable cups.

In June 2018 Scottish Government confirmed its commitment to reducing the use of single-use plastics in our staff restaurants and, where we continue to use plastics, to working towards them being recyclable.

Scottish Government committed to removing all disposable cups for teas and coffees in our staff restaurants by summer 2018. We proposed to do this by:

- making available, and encouraging the use of, ceramic cups, and
- encouraging the use of reusable cups.

Delivery

The development of options and the delivery of changes was undertaken by the Contracts Team, the Environmental Management Team, Corporate Communications, Behavioural Change and our catering contractor with Zero Waste Scotland acting in an advisory capacity.

Commitment #1: making available, and encouraging the use of, ceramic cups

- selection of cup to ensure it: worked with machines, it stacked well and it was robust
- the arrangement of cups at self-service 'Black and White' machines was changed to give ceramic cups prominence – staff had to reach over ceramic cups to get a disposable
- the baristas at the branded coffee outlets asked customers 'are you sitting in?' – an affirmative reply would automatically have resulted in the use of a ceramic, a negative reply would receive the follow-up question 'have you brought your own cup?'
- additional ceramic cups were ordered and the numbers available were kept under review – in case more were needed. To some extent, the number of ceramics in use at any one time is determined by the speed of the 'Black & White' machines.
- the refresh rate necessary to ensure adequate numbers of ceramics are available to customers is monitored on an ongoing basis. Ceramics are subject to damage and removal from staff restaurants/theft.
- we agreed with our cleaning provider that where cleaning staff came across restaurant mugs in tea-prep areas, as part of their normal duties, they would help return them – as long as this didn't become too onerous.

Commitment #2: Encouraging the use of reusable cups

KeepCups had been on sale in our buildings from August 2015 and their use had given users a discount on the purchase of teas and coffees.

The use of other forms of travel mug had previously been discussed but had not been allowed because of concerns about: cross contamination, quality control and the suitability of mugs that might be presented.

In order to drive forward the move to reusable mugs we decided to: expand the range of reusable mugs that we had on sale, run promotions for a limited period of time and, allow staff to start using their own travel mugs.

KeepCups:

At the time of their introduction into the Scottish Government we had assessed KeepCups as the best reusable option. A negative aspect to their use was the fact that they had been manufactured in Australia but by 2018 manufacture was also being undertaken in the UK.

As the KeepCup was an established brand that was already associated with our efforts to reduce waste it was retained as part of our wider offering.

Pokito:

We recognised that there are many mobile workers in the SG and although KeepCups are light in weight they are relatively bulky to carry with you. We were aware from the media that collapsible mugs were available and we identified the Pokito as a suitable example.

Branded reusable:

We noted that a large number of customers who were sitting-in with a premium coffee were using branded disposable cups even though ceramic cups were available. We concluded that this must be to do with brand identity so we included a reusable cup that was as close as possible in terms of look and feel to the branded disposables.

Pricing:

Since their introduction, KeepCups had been sold at a competitive price in relation to what they would cost on the high street. In order to support the withdrawal of disposables and to promote the reusable alternatives we ran a special promotion during the months either side of the 4 June date.

Some consideration was given to the sale of a very cheap (£1.00) reusable for those occasions where a member of staff had forgotten their reusable mug, and perhaps for visitors, but this was not pursued as we felt that we already had enough options and that mugs of that type would be treated as expensive disposables.

During the phasing out of disposables we did receive a very small number of queries with respect to whether or not we could make other options available for sale. However, as there were only a handful of such queries we think the range of three options for sale was a good solution.

Anticipating demand and deciding how many of each type of mug to order proved challenging. We also suffered with regard to delivery times as the demand for these items increased substantially during the period of our orders.

Own travel mugs:

Although both our catering contractor and our catering advisor had been resistant to staff bringing in their own mugs at the time that KeepCups were first introduced in 2015, by 2018 things had changed. Our catering contractor was now pro-active in offering to move to allowing staff to bring their own travel mugs as long as they are clean and that they have a lid.

This change necessitated additional training for catering staff (including updates on food safety and how to politely decline to serve staff who presented a mug that could not be cleaned by a quick rinse) and the development of new procedures for the making of coffees.

Following surveys conducted among staff, it was identified that people needed facilities to clean their mugs. Soap and brushes are now stocked in kitchen areas throughout the buildings by our cleaning provider.

Visitors

Hot drinks for visitors can be provided through 'in-room catering' (corporate hospitality) or, for less-formal meetings, through the use of ceramics in staff restaurants. The preparations for the removal of disposables did uncover a substantial demand for a more flexible solution to cover meetings convened at short-notice or those that were not taking place in meeting rooms or staff restaurants.

We investigated options for a loan scheme using KeepCups that were identifiable by colour or by having 'Property of ...' printed on them. Time constraints meant that we were unable to pursue any print-based option so we designed a colour combination that was not available for sale in our restaurants. Visitor KeepCups are signed-out – which also allows staff to charge these coffees/hot drinks against the appropriate cost centre rather than pay for them out of their own pocket which had been happening.

We also considered promoting the option of buying a number of mugs for the use of visitors to Business Managers, but this was not pursued.

An initial screening for an Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) had found that the difference in weight between a disposable cardboard cup and a reusable cup was marginal in the context of a hot drink. Nevertheless, we did make a small number of very lightweight cups, with handles, available for visitors at our branded coffee points.

Programme

- we pursued a phased approach to the removal of disposables, with staff being able to bring their own travel mugs from the end of March.
- our catering contractor managed their stocks of disposables so that they were run-down as far as possible for the 4 June. Any residual stock was transferred to other contracts at no cost to SG.

Pricing strategy

- SG would generally prefer to reward good behaviours – hence the discount offered for use of KeepCups – but during the change process we were advised that charging for a disposable cup is far more effective. However, as we were already introducing a significant change we decided not to further complicate matters and to retain our existing ‘carrot’ policy for the final weeks leading up to the removal of disposables.
- an anomaly from our existing pricing policy was highlighted. Avoiding the use of a disposable by using a KeepCup received a discount but doing so by using a ceramic did not. Again, to avoid overly complicating matters, we only addressed this pricing anomaly at the point disposables were withdrawn on 4 June.
- after disposables were phased out the discounted prices became the standard prices – this might actually have been understood a little more easily by staff if we had taken a ‘stick’ approach and had been charging for disposables.

Communications

While the issues that were likely to occur, and their potential solutions, had been given considerable thought before engaging with Corporate Communications, this did give us an opportunity to test some of our thinking.

We completed a Corporate Communications Planning Template which covered; business objectives, the audience for the communications, the impacts of the change on that audience, key messages, communications linkages and evaluation (what does success look like?)

We undertook an iPad-based survey to confirm/understand the issues that we thought would impact on staff and thereby inform the type of communications that we prepared.

We used a variety of communication mediums in order to ‘catch’ as many staff as possible.

These included: intranet, the Yammer social networking channel, electronic screens, posters and table-talkers.

We used #UseYerMug to help spread Yammer communications.

We ran a weekly photographic competition where staff could submit photographs of their reusable mug with the chance to win a prize of a piece of fruit or a cake.

Our catering contractor's staff were briefed to remind staff of the change on the run-up to 4 June. They also undertook role-playing exercises in order to prepare for dealing with customer questions.

Senior managers were briefed on the change and we received support from the Permanent Secretary (News in Brief, Tweet etc.)

We used accessible imagery: if you laid all the cups that we saved end-to-end they would stretch from Edinburgh to Dundee.

Although there were some concerns among staff when the announcement was made, this seems to have been addressed by the supporting measures described above. By the time the move to reusable cups was fully implemented, the transition was fairly seamless, and feedback has generally been positive.

Impact on sales

Analysis of coffee/hot drink sales over the full year suggests there has been a drop in sales following the introduction of the ban. The hot weather during the summer may have contributed towards the overall decrease. However, having run the full year analysis we can ascertain that the downturn continued into the winter months on a similar trend. The combined reduction for the full year is an approximate downturn of 16%.

Despite the overall drop in coffee/hot drink sales we identified a change in the spending habit of customers where the lost drink sales have been converted to additional food purchases. We would have expected to have noted a 16% drop in overall income for the 2018/2019 year based on the information above however our end of year sales analysis has shown an actual 1% reduction against the budget and a 1.5% increase on the prior year actuals.