

SUPPORT FOR THE LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES (SHOPPING BAGS)
BILL
WDA/07/08

Recommendation

It is recommended that:-

1. Further to the request from Metropolitan Borough of Wirral the Chairperson write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs supporting any actions the Government wishes to take towards the future reduction in use of plastic bags.

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Report of the Director

1. **Purpose of the report**

- 1.1 To consider a request from Metropolitan Borough of Wirral to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to support the forthcoming London Local Authorities Bill. See attached letter from Wirral MBC at Appendix 1.

2. **Background**

- 2.1 Metropolitan Borough of Wirral Council at their meeting on Monday 17th December 2007 proposed the following motion "(1) this Council seeks to further support and encourage retailers, businesses and commercial manufacture's to reduce unnecessary and wasteful packaging, in particular the widespread use of plastic bags, (2) Council welcomes the work of London Councils in initiating legislation for a levy to be paid on all plastic bags currently provided free by supermarkets. Council also welcomes schemes already introduced in Modbury and Brighton to end the use of plastic bags, (3) This council resolves to take a lead in reducing free plastic bag provision. At this meeting the following motion was approved "(ii) instructing the Chief Executive and calling upon the Mersey Waste Disposal Authority to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs requesting that the Government supports the forthcoming London Local Authorities Bill and introduces legislation enabling councils outside London to introduce such a levy". Following approval, Metropolitan Borough of Wirral wrote to the Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority requesting this support.
- 2.2 The use of plastic bags from retailers has long been used to transport goods bought from the store to the person's home. Normally these plastic bags are given away free by the retailers. Due to the plastic bags being free, people normally take more than is needed which leads to excess plastic bags being taken.
- 2.3 These plastic bags once used are then either discarded and then have to be managed via a street cleansing operation or disposed of directly into residual waste bin.

- 2.4 Once disposed of, the energy used to manufacture and the energy retained within the plastic bags is lost. It takes approximately 500 years for plastic to degrade in a landfill.
- 2.5 Whilst members will be aware that some plastics can currently be recycled as part of some collection systems or at Household Waste Recycling Centres, the type of plastic that is used to make the plastic bags in question is not a type of plastic that is recycled on Merseyside. Due to this, the plastic bags which are placed into recycling collections can contaminate the secondary material collected, so lowering its quality and value. Operationally, plastic bags at the Bidston MRF can be a problem as they occasionally become stuck within the equipment causing it to break-down.
- 2.6 Within the UK, Modbury in Devon from the 1st May 2007, became the first town in the British Isles to stop issuing plastic shopping bags when goods are purchased. Every trader joined together in this venture. Brighton and Hove Council are also moving towards the cessation of giving free plastic retail bags away. Ireland has since August 2002, instigated a plastic bag levy (approximately 10p). It has been seen since then that there has been a dramatic reduction of plastic bags being seen as part of general litter. It is clear that the levy has not only changed consumer behaviour in relation to disposable plastic bags, it has also raised national consciousness about the role each person can take to tackle collectively the problems of litter and waste management.
- 2.7 The impact of plastic bag use in terms of an individual's carbon footprint is small when compared to other household activities such as energy use and transport. However, it is one area that MWDA can impact upon by supporting the Government in its stance on plastic bag reduction.
- 2.8 Due to the wide-ranging nature of the Bill as currently drafted, it is recommended that MWDA restrict its request to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to support actions that the Government wishes to take towards the future reduction in use of plastic bags. A draft letter is included at Appendix 2.

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The background documents to this report are open to inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 - Nil