

CABINET – 7 FEBRUARY 2012
SECTION 3: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 JANUARY 2012

**EXCERPT OF DRAFT MINUTES FOR AGENDA ITEM 7 (UPDATE ON
GENERAL USE OF PLASTIC BAGS)**

The Chair noted that this item had been scheduled at the request of Councillor Fletcher.

The Town Centre Manager introduced Jennie Hall, the Finance and Operations Manager from Marks & Spencer (M&S), in place of her colleague Darren Price who was unable to attend. He explained that Jennie would make a short verbal presentation to the Committee in relation to the discussion paper that had been circulated and would be unable to answer more general questions about M&S policies, etc.

Jennie stressed the importance of Plan A which was integral to M&S, with 180 commitments to change the way they work, 95 of which had been achieved.

Plastic bags were a key focus for M&S who issued an average of 133 plastic bags per person, per annum. A 7% reduction in the number of bags issued by M&S would result in 280 million less plastic bags a year. M&S introduced the 5 pence charge per food bag, as research showed that charging for the use of bags was more effective than offering incentives for not using them and at the same time raised money for charity. There were currently no plans to charge for any bags other than those for food but the bags used by M&S were better than some, as M&S used recycled polythene.

Other measures adopted by M&S included the Oxfam Clothes Exchange, unsold food sent to anaerobic digestion to generate energy to light and heat stores and a reduction of non-glass packaging. Full details of the achievements to date and aims for the coming year were set out in the 'How We Do Business 2011' report which was available on the M&S website.

In response to a question from a member of the committee, Jennie confirmed that sales had not been impacted by the introduction of charges for food bags, though some customers were initially reluctant to pay. The solution was educating customers to kick the habit of using plastic bags.

Responding to a question from a member of the committee the Town Centre Manager proposed that it was in the interest of retailers to reduce the number of plastic bags issued as this would reduce their costs but equally they didn't want to make it difficult for consumers to purchase goods. He felt that the drive

needed to come from the consumers and highlighted that the Regent Arcade had introduced a programme by which they would exchange a plastic bag for a bag for life.

Members commended M&S for their efforts, innovation and successes and whilst generally accepting the reasons given by Jennie as to why bag charges didn't apply to clothing purchases, they felt this should be explored and considered.

Members recognised that there was no Council funding available to educate consumers and agreed that the focus should be supporting the efforts of the retailers. Suggestions included;

- Create a webpage on the Council website which outlines the negative impact plastic bags have on the environment and detail local examples of good practice (M&S, Regent Arcade, etc).
- Identify retailers who are not making efforts to reduce the number of plastic bags issued, though another member felt that by highlighting good practice some retailers would be noticeable by their absence.
- Organise a competition to develop a strap line for Cheltenham that conveys that shoppers are welcome but they should bring their own bags.
- The Echo could link up with local Schools. Children could design their own bag for life and once printed, perhaps the parents would be more inclined to use them. This may be a potential initiative for the 'Promoting Cheltenham Fund'.
- Ask whether a company has a policy in relation to the use of plastic bags as part of the Planning process, though this would be for information only rather than a deciding factor in any application.

The Climate Change & Sustainability Officer felt all the issues raised in the discussion paper had been addressed and Members had no further questions.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the committee recommends that Cabinet;

- 1. Consider working with local press and/or Schools on a promotional campaign of some description (based on the suggestions of the Committee);**
- 2. Speak to Planning Officers about whether there is any provision for reviewing a retailers plastic bag policy as part of future planning applications.**