

BACKGROUND

In 2018, in response to interest by councillors in addressing the issue of Single Use Plastics (SUPs) in local authority buildings, Cork County Council Environment Team decided to put a formal waste action plan in place. The plan went beyond just SUPs and aimed to develop a detailed understanding of the waste being generated across their main sites. The team wanted an evidence-based approach which would allow them to target specific actions and, most importantly, track improvements made over time.

The focus of the work was in the four main local authority sites of County Hall, Iniscarra, Mallow and Clonakilty. During initial investigations it became apparent that getting consistent waste data across these sites was going to be challenging. A number of different waste collectors were involved, the bills went to different locations and the information contained in these bills varied. It became evident that a coordinated waste management service and monitoring system was needed across the council.



DELIVERY

Once the background waste data had been collected a series of waste characterisations were carried out.

This allowed the effectiveness of the waste management systems in place at each site to be examined – including whether sufficient segregation services were provided. As with any business, local authorities often have waste management systems that have evolved over time and may no longer be fit-for-purpose – this was the case in some of the sites examined.

The waste surveys produced interesting results. It was found that while SUPs could certainly be reduced, there were much larger issues with food waste segregation and volume and management of disposable coffee cups.



RESULTS AND NEXT STEPS

The results of this project can be broken into 2 categories – site specific actions and systemic changes.

The waste surveys provided site-specific information on the problem areas in terms of services and specific materials. More importantly, the gathering of the background information allowed the sites to be benchmarked against each other. Based on this information, a detailed Green Workplace report was produced and presented to the Senior Management Green Team for consideration. It is expected that this will translate into an action plan being developed in 2022.

The regular waste monitoring system now in place has in itself become more significant. This work coincided with an Interreg Funded EU project to develop an online monitoring system for energy. This project has since been extended to incorporate the waste and water tracking from this LAPN project on the same system. It is hoped that once the mechanics of this online system have been refined it will facilitate accurate monitoring and tracking across all of the council's main sites.



Comhairle Contae Chorcaí  
 Cork County Council

For more information please contact: [cep@epa.ie](mailto:cep@epa.ie)

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