



ReLondon

Reducing single-use plastic consumption

A review of action and opportunities for London

May 2021



CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
2. Overview of actions to reduce single-use plastic consumption in London	11
3. Delving deeper	15
4. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic	35
5. Learnings from other places	40
6. Action opportunities	44
7. Conclusions	47



INTRODUCTION



I. INTRODUCTION

Reduction and reuse are key elements of a low-carbon circular city. Reducing what we consume, and keeping products in use for longer, has a direct impact on the CO²e emissions generated by the production, transportation and disposal of new products and services.

In London, plastic makes up approximately 9% of the household waste stream¹ (by weight) with plastic packaging accounting for nearly 70% of this. The majority of plastic packaging is single-use.

Reducing London's consumption of single-use plastic packaging (as well as other single-use plastic items that are commonly found in the municipal waste stream)² therefore has the potential to significantly reduce waste and contribute to the year-on-year CO²e emissions reductions required to tackle the climate emergency.

In London, where the Mayor and 28 of the boroughs (as of the time of writing) have declared a climate

emergency, a raft of actions has been taken by public, private and third sector actors to reduce the use of single-use plastic packaging and single-use plastic items frequently found in the municipal waste stream.

This report from ReLondon presents the results of research to review these actions. It outlines a series of 'action opportunities' which could help to support and strengthen existing activity, and in doing so accelerate efforts to reduce consumption of single-use plastic in London.



I.1 Context

We are living through a climate emergency and the actions we take now will have a fundamental impact upon us and future generations. The science of climate change is well understood, as is the global consensus that action is needed.

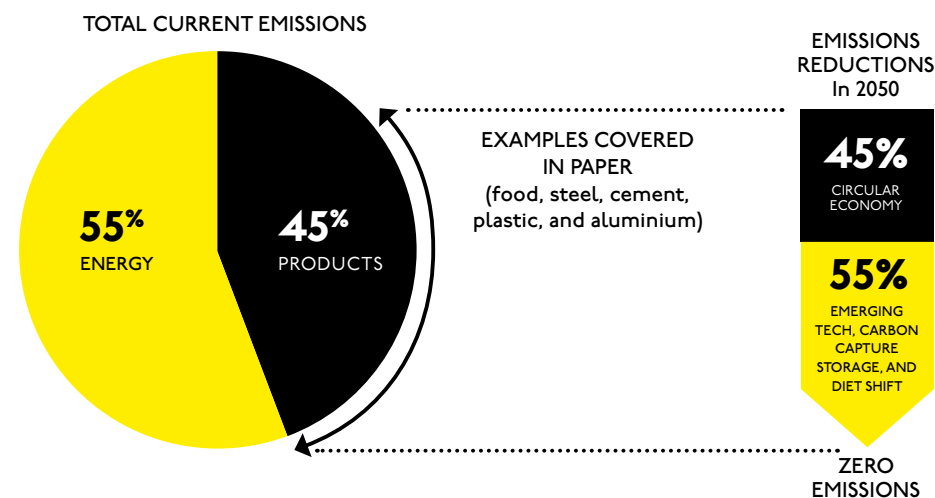
Efforts to tackle the climate emergency have focused on a transition to renewable energy, complemented by energy efficiency. Though crucial, these measures can only address up to 55% of emissions. The remaining 45% come from the global management of land and the production of the food, materials and products (or 'stuff') we make, use and consume every day³ (see Figure I). A circular economy can help deliver reductions in these emissions by transforming the way we make, consume and dispose of stuff.

A circular economy is one in which stuff is kept in use for as long as possible, delivering the highest value it can, for as long as it can. Rather than making something, using it, and then throwing it away (a linear system), a circular economy means looking at each of those stages for new ways of circling the value back so that materials and products can be used again and again, and in many different forms.

- It's about designing products for multiple uses, for easy repair and maintenance, and for easy disassembly once reuse or repair of the whole is no longer possible.
- It's about manufacturing products from non-toxic, renewable, recycled and recyclable materials, or using processes that design waste out.
- It's about finding more efficient ways to recover materials at the end of their first life and prepare them for successful second (or third, or fourth) lives.
- It's about creating viable business models of leasing or renting products to consumers, so businesses and brands can take control of the maintenance, reuse, repair and ultimately recycling of products.
- It's about creating new ways to enable people to share products and space, minimising wasted resources.

Cities are the engine room of a circular economy, and London, a global city of nine million people, aims to be a leader in pioneering this shift. Policymakers, businesses and citizens all have a part to play in tackling consumption as a driver of climate change.

Figure I: 45% of CO₂e emissions are from products and agriculture



Source: Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2019.⁴

1.2 Single-use plastic

The overuse of plastic, especially single-use plastic packaging, and its impact as litter in the environment has come to symbolise our linear, unsustainable 'take, make, use, and dispose' consumption patterns. Plastic packaging includes bottles, film, carrier bags, and pots, tubs and trays (e.g., margarine tubs, ice-cream tubs and yoghurt pots).

Globally, plastic production has increased twenty-fold since 1964, reaching 311 million tonnes in 2014. Plastic packaging is the largest application, representing 26% of the total volume. 78 million tonnes of plastic packaging were put on the market in 2013; only 14% of this was collected for recycling and 32% was attributed to 'leakage' from the system. This means it was either not collected for treatment of any kind, or it was collected but then mismanaged or illegally dumped, thereby losing valuable material at a huge cost to the industry.⁵ At least eight million tonnes of plastic per year leak into the ocean, with estimates from many sources declaring that packaging makes up the largest proportion.⁶

According to WRAP's latest plastics market situation report,⁷ UK plastic waste arisings for 2019 were

estimated at 3.7 million tonnes, of which packaging was the main source representing 59% of the total.

In London, plastic makes up approximately 9% of the household waste stream (by weight) with plastic packaging accounting for nearly 70% of this.⁸

The majority of plastic packaging is single-use, defined as plastic that is used only once, or for a short period of time, and then thrown away.

Reducing London's consumption of single-use plastic packaging (as well as other single-use plastic items that are commonly found in the municipal waste stream)⁹ therefore offers a significant opportunity to reduce waste and CO₂e emissions.

While all 33 London boroughs currently offer a household collection of plastic bottles for recycling,¹⁰ and most offer a collection for pots, tubs and trays (four currently do not,

although of these two boroughs are planning to roll this out and two are considering trialling this), no boroughs currently collect and recycle plastic film (although collection services are offered by some retailers). There is also currently very little provision across the capital for recycling plastic on-the-go. Action further up the waste hierarchy offers the biggest opportunity to reduce the amount of single-use plastic packaging Londoners use in the first place.



1.3 The changing policy landscape

Public awareness and concern about the scale of single-use plastic consumption in the UK, and the resulting environmental consequences, has increased in the UK in recent years. This has been influenced at least in part by Blue Planet II, as well as other high profile initiatives including Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall's War on Waste. Research carried out in 2018 found that seven in eight UK adults were at least "fairly concerned" about the effects of plastic waste on the environment,¹¹ and a 2019 YouGov survey found that 82% of Britons were actively trying to reduce the amount of plastic they throw away.¹²

Changes to the UK policy landscape in relation to single-use plastic have followed. The UK Government's 25-year environment plan sets out goals to work towards all plastic packaging placed on the market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025, and to achieve zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042. The resources and waste strategy, published in 2018 by the UK Government, contained a number of policies aimed at reducing plastic waste, many of which have now been consulted on (see Box I and Table I for more on this).

Looking to London, the Mayor set out commitments in the 2018 London Environment Strategy (LES)¹³ to significantly reduce the amount of waste that is produced in the UK's capital city, with a focus on water bottles and coffee cups. The LES also committed to support campaigns and initiatives to cut the use of single-use packaging.

Against this policy backdrop, there has been a proliferation of actions in London by public, private and third sector actors to achieve a reduction in consumption of single-use plastic packaging and other single-use plastic items that, post-use, are commonly found in the municipal waste stream.

BOX I: UK POLICIES IN RELATION TO SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

The UK Government's Resources and Waste Strategy (RWS) for England,¹⁴ published in 2018, committed to work towards all plastic packaging placed on the market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025. Consultations on an updated Extended Producer Responsibility system for packaging and a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers were held in 2019 and a second consultation is underway at the time of writing. A tax on the production and import of plastic packaging which contains less than 30% recycled content will be introduced in April 2022. The RWS also commits to delivering on the Greening Government Commitments, including removing consumer single-use plastics from the Government estate by 2020. Table I below provides an overview of current and planned UK policies in relation to single-use plastic reduction.





Table I: Status of UK single-use plastic reduction policies

POLICY	STATUS
Ban on plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds.	Came into force in England on 1 October 2020.
Single-use plastic bag 5p charge.	The 5p charge was introduced in England 2015 and applies to any retailer employing 250 people or more. It was increased from 5p to 10p and extended to all retailers from April 2021.
Extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging.	An EPR system for packaging is set to be introduced across the UK in 2023. The second round of consultation closes in June 2021.
Deposit return scheme (DRS) for drinks containers (bottles and cans).	A DRS is set to be introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2023. The second consultation closes in June 2021.
Plastic packaging tax.	The Government is planning to introduce a new tax, across the UK, on plastic packaging which does not meet a minimum threshold of at least 30% recycled content from April 2022.

Source: gov.uk website.

1.4 About this report

ReLondon is a partnership of the Mayor of London and the London boroughs to improve waste and resource management and transform the city into a leading low carbon circular economy. Its business plan¹⁵ for 2020 – 2025 places consumption and its role in the production of CO₂e emissions at the heart of all its activity, with emphasis on activities that reduce waste, increase recycling, and enable an accelerated and just transition to a circular economy. ReLondon focuses on five key areas of consumption: plastic, food, fashion, electricals and the built environment.

ReLondon's work on plastic focuses on reducing London's consumption of single-use plastic and increasing the proportion of plastic packaging that is recycled in London.

To inform the actions that ReLondon could take – together with the Mayor of London, businesses, and boroughs – to enable a reduction in single-use plastic consumption in London, an understanding of what actions were already being taken by public, private and third sector organisations was needed.

This report presents the results of research and analysis carried out by

ReLondon between September 2020 and February 2021, which aimed to:

- ♦ Review what actions were being implemented in London by public, private and third sector actors prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce single-use plastic consumption (see Box 2 for more details on the scope of the review).
- ♦ Identify evidence of the impact of these actions on municipal waste and CO₂e emissions.
- ♦ Understand how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted actions and material use in London.

- ♦ Review actions being implemented in other cities and places around the world to reduce single-use plastic, and identify good practice from other cities which might be applicable to London.

The report also identifies opportunities for future action to accelerate positive change in London - either by strengthening current actions or implementing new actions to fill any gaps. These 'action opportunities' were informed by a stakeholder workshop convened by ReLondon in February 2021.

BOX 2: SCOPE

The review focused on actions active prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that aimed to reduce use of **post-consumer single-use plastic items and packaging that are commonly found in the municipal waste stream**. Actions to reduce single-use plastic found in commercial (e.g. back of shop) or industrial waste streams were, therefore, excluded from the scope of this research.

The research methodology is outlined in Box 3. The report was written during the UK lockdown at the start of 2021. It should be noted that following the completion of the report substantial changes were made to COVID-19 restrictions and interventions, particularly relating to the hospitality sector. All references and findings are correct to the best of our knowledge at the time of report completion (01 April 2021).

The report supports, and seeks to contribute to, the COVID-19 recovery missions developed by the Greater London Authority (GLA). The missions aim to use the recovery from the pandemic to reimagine the city as a place with a better long-term future for Londoners; one which is fairer, greener and more resilient than it was before.¹⁶

BOX 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research comprised a number of different phases:

- The first was a desk-based review to identify key activities and initiatives underway in the months immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic that aimed to reduce single-use plastic – both in London and in other places around the UK and the world. Data were generously provided by the GLA, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, and ReLondon’s Business Transformation programme, to assist with this review.
- The second phase involved an online questionnaire which was completed by 12 London boroughs and one London waste disposal authority. The questionnaire intended to map both internal and external facing interventions being taken to reduce single-use plastic prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, understand what these actions achieved, and explore whether COVID-19 had any impact on these interventions. The questionnaire was added to borough data already collected from the 33 reduction and recycling plans¹⁷ completed by all the London boroughs (including the City of London Corporation).
- The third phase involved a series of interviews and email correspondence with a sample of key stakeholders acting in London to reduce single-use plastic. Stakeholders, which included representatives from the GLA, University College London, Cup Club, Crouch End Plastic Free Community, City to Sea, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, North London Waste Authority, City of London Corporation, Shaftesbury PLC, and the London borough of Hackney, were asked in detail about interventions they have implemented to reduce generation of single-use plastic waste, their effectiveness and impact, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The final phase of the research comprised a stakeholder workshop with representatives from the GLA, London boroughs, businesses, and not-for-profits, which was held in February 2021. Participants were invited to reflect on and discuss the preliminary findings of our research, and exchange ideas for potential interventions by ReLondon and others which could accelerate a reduction in single-use plastic waste in London. Discussions had during the stakeholder workshop informed the ‘action opportunities’ set out in this report.

The background of the slide is a close-up, high-angle shot of numerous crumpled, translucent plastic bags. The bags are piled together, creating a complex, textured surface with many sharp folds and highlights. The overall color palette is muted, consisting of various shades of grey, white, and light blue, giving it a desaturated, almost monochromatic appearance. This background is partially obscured by a bright yellow horizontal band that contains the title text.

2

OVERVIEW OF ACTIONS TO REDUCE SINGLE-USE PLASTIC CONSUMPTION IN LONDON

2. OVERVIEW OF ACTIONS TO REDUCE SINGLE-USE PLASTIC CONSUMPTION IN LONDON

Actions underway prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce the consumption of single-use plastic by Londoners spanned a broad spectrum of different approaches.

Table 2 provides an overview of this spectrum, with examples of some of the actions that were underway pre-pandemic and the actors involved.

From left to right, the spectrum moves from actions to inform and inspire citizens to change their behaviour, such as marketing campaigns and waste education in schools; through actions to influence businesses (and other stakeholders) to act, such as corporate pledge schemes and awards; to direct action, typically taken by the retail and food service sectors, to reduce the amount of single-use plastic put on the market and influence, edit and incentivise the choices made by consumers.

While some actions did tend to lend themselves more naturally to specific actors – waste education in schools, for example, tends to be implemented by London boroughs – our research showed that each of the stakeholder groups have tended to pursue multiple approaches and an assortment of actions:

- ♦ The Mayor of London supported the Refill London scheme¹⁸ to

increase the number of free water refill points provided by London shops, businesses, venues and cafes; entered into a £5 million partnership with Thames Water to install over 100 new public drinking fountains adding to the 28 already installed in partnership with ZSL;¹⁹ and led by example in reducing single-use plastic in cafes and other facilities across the Greater London Authority (GLA) Group.²⁰

- ♦ The London boroughs' Reduction and Recycling Plans²¹ (RRPs), amongst other priorities, set out a variety of actions for reducing single-use plastic waste, including implementing communications campaigns, rolling out 'low-plastic' communities or zones, installing drinking fountains in the public realm, and trialling refill or reuse schemes in the community. Many boroughs have also taken steps to eliminate or reduce single-use plastic within their own operations and at borough-run events.
- ♦ Third sector actors have likewise implemented communication



campaigns and rolled out corporate behaviour change pledge schemes and 'low-plastic' communities or zones. Notably, NGO City to Sea also developed the Refill app, a free tool to help citizens find free drinking water and discourage consumption of single-use water bottles.

- ♦ Many London businesses have taken action, either voluntarily or as part of a corporate pledge scheme, to reduce the amount

of single-use plastic they put on the market and change the choices available to and made by consumers at the point of sale or consumption – either expanding the choices available (i.e. increasing access to alternatives); editing or restricting the choices available (i.e. replacing or banning certain single-use plastic items or packaging elements); or incentivising certain choices (e.g. through introducing discounts and charges).

BOX 4: UNDERSTANDING THE SOLUTION OPTIONS FOR SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

A reduction in consumption of single-use plastic can be achieved either through the elimination (without replacement) of those items or packaging elements which are avoidable within the context that they are used; or, through the introduction or provision of one of three alternatives, described below.²²

These solution options are not equal and should be deployed on a case-by-case basis. Other than the elimination of those single-use items or packaging elements which are avoidable, they all involve replacing the single-use plastic item or packaging with another, which will come with its own environmental impacts both in terms of production and end of life disposal.

All actions to reduce single-use plastic consumption, whether a public information campaign, a pledge scheme, or direct action taken by a retailer or food service provider to influence consumer choices, leverage one or more of these solution options.

1. Refill

Reusable products, containers and packaging are owned by consumers who reuse and refill them instead of using single-use plastic.

Example: The Mayor of London launched a £5 million fund with Thames Water to install over 100 new drinking fountains. Consumers can refill their own reusable water bottles at these drinking fountains, instead of purchasing a single-use plastic bottle.

2. Reuse

Consumers use reusable products, containers and packaging that are owned and managed by a third party, instead of using single-use plastic.

Example: The London borough of Tower Hamlets introduced a takeback reusable cup scheme in partnership with 60 coffee shops. Customers at participating shops were able to pay a deposit to

use a reusable cup, which was redeemable when the cup was returned to the shop. The reusable cups were owned by the shop, who cleaned cups that were returned before putting them back into circulation.

3. Substitute

Single-use plastic items and packaging are substituted for alternative single-use materials (which is done sometimes, but not always, to replace plastic with a renewable material).

Example: Many retailers and food service providers have substituted single-use plastic items and packaging for alternative single-use materials. Thornton's Budgens supermarket, for example, introduced plastic free zones in its stores. According to their website, the main materials that they use instead of plastic are beechwood netting, paper, aluminium, glass and sugarcane.²³

Table 2: Approaches to reducing single-use plastic consumption in London

ACTORS	INFORMING AND INSPIRING CITIZENS	INFLUENCING BUSINESSES TO ACT	INFLUENCING, EDITING AND INCENTIVISING CONSUMER CHOICES
Local government (London boroughs and the GLA Group)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information campaigns (both internal, targeting staff, and external, targeting citizens). • Events (e.g. quizzes and workshops) for citizens. • Waste reduction guidelines for households. • Waste education in schools. • Schemes to encourage pledging of behavioural change by citizens. • Zero waste challenges for citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schemes to encourage pledging of behavioural change by organisations. • The establishment of 'Low Plastic' or 'Plastic Free' areas or zones. • Award schemes for businesses to encourage better practices and innovation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of single-use plastic items or packaging and introduction of alternatives across borough-controlled buildings. • Introduction of alternatives in the public realm and in the community (e.g. drinking fountains, reusable coffee cup schemes). • Incentives (e.g. discounts and charges) to influence consumer behaviour in borough-controlled buildings. • Procurement guidelines for borough-run events.
Retailers and food service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and advertising for new products and services. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of single-use plastic items or packaging and introduction of alternatives. • Incentives (e.g. discounts and charges) to influence consumer behaviour.
NGOs and community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public information campaigns. • Public events (e.g. quizzes and workshops). • Schemes to encourage pledging of behavioural change by citizens. • Tools to help citizens locate and access solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schemes to encourage pledging of behavioural change by organisations. • The establishment of 'Low Plastic' or 'Plastic Free' areas or zones. • Production and dissemination of good practice case studies and guidelines for businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilots of new solutions in the community, usually in delivered in partnership with a London borough (e.g. Tower Hamlets' borrow a bag scheme).
Universities, venues, corporate offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information campaigns (both internal, targeting staff, and external, targeting visitors, students or the public). • Schemes to encourage pledging of behavioural change by citizens. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of single-use plastic items or packaging and introduction of alternatives. • Incentives (e.g. discounts and charges) to influence consumer behaviour.
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public information campaigns. • Schemes to encourage pledging of behaviour change by citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schemes to encourage pledging of behavioural change by organisations. 	

Source: ReLondon analysis with framework adapted from Chatham House (2015).²⁴



3

DELVING DEEPER



3. DELVING DEEPER

In this section we consider some of the actions taken to reduce single-use plastic consumption in more detail. It should be noted from the outset that at no point does this report seek to pass judgement on activities; rather it intends to highlight opportunities to strengthen them and accelerate a reduction in single-use plastic consumption in the capital.

3.1 Informing and inspiring citizens

A range of actions were being implemented to inform and inspire citizens to change their behaviour pre-pandemic,²⁵ largely by public and third sector actors.

These included marketing and advertising campaigns delivered through a variety of media and at a variety of scales, waste minimisation guidelines, tools to help citizens find solutions (such as the Refill app, which maps 3,600 free water refill points across London), zero waste challenges for citizens, and waste education in schools.

Some examples are highlighted here in more detail. Figure 2 provides examples of the various actions set out in borough RRP's to inform and empower consumers, grouped by theme.

Hello London, Goodbye Ocean Plastic

The #OneLess campaign ran a marketing campaign in the summer of 2019, targeting London tourists and visitors. It was delivered through several channels including digital and out-of-home advertising. The key message was to stop using single-use plastic water bottles, and instead refill at public drinking fountains and refill points in shops and cafes. The message was framed within the context of the ocean plastic pollution crisis. Evaluation showed the adverts reached five million people and that those who were presented with the advert were 30% more likely to use public drinking fountains and 34% more likely to stop using single-use plastic water bottles.

#ZeroWasteHackney challenge 2020

Hackney Council runs an annual #ZeroWasteHackney challenge to encourage citizens in Hackney to reduce the amount of waste they throw away. In 2020, the campaign ran for the whole month of September during which tips, advice and encouragement were provided to participants. These focused on a number of different themes including reducing packaging and switching to reusable items. 128 people participated in the challenge. Based on responses to a feedback form given by a sample of 15 participants, 33% of those who participated reported to have reduced their waste between 25 and 50% during the challenge.

National Refill Day 2019

City to Sea ran an awareness-raising campaign in London in the run up to National Refill Day 2019 (19 June) using out-of-home advertising on digital screens in rail stations in London. Adverts encouraged people to refill, instead of buying single-use plastic water bottles, and to download the Refill app to find out where they could find free refill points in London. Evaluative research found that that 28% of those that were presented with the advert intended to download the Refill app.

Plastic Free July 2020

London Recycles ran a social media awareness-raising campaign during July 2020, which contained practical actions that London residents could take to reduce their single-use plastic consumption. These included:

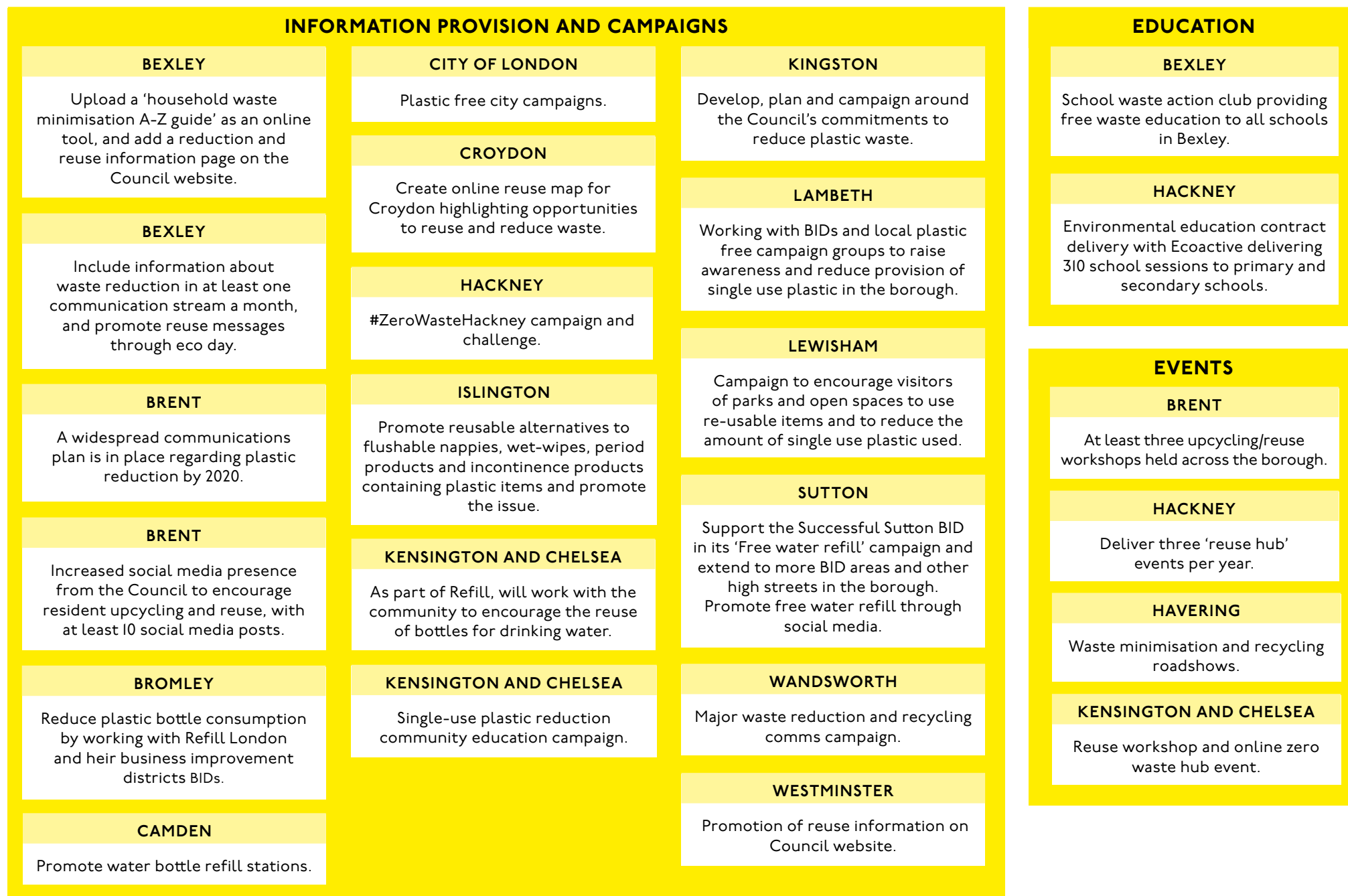
- Using a soap bar instead of shower gel;
- Use a refillable water bottle instead of buying single-use ones;
- Using a natural loofah, which can be composted after use;
- Using a safety razor instead of disposable razors;
- Using rags to clean, rather than wet wipes.

The campaign reached 1.2 million people over the course of the month.

Refill app

The Refill app, powered by NGO City to Sea and championed by the Mayor of London, is a tool to help people access free drinking water points so that they can avoid consuming single-use plastic water bottles. The app maps the locations of free refill stations across London, helping to connect Londoners with places where they can fill up their refillable water bottle. In October 2020, the focus of the app was extended beyond water refill points to locations where consumers can access packaging-free and reuse options, as well as other refill product ranges, while on-the-go. The process of mapping locations is a big focus for City to Sea's work in 2021. There are 3,600 refill stations in London at the time of writing, and 147,872 active app users in London. City to Sea estimates that 100 million drink bottles have been saved by people using the refill stations listed on the app.

Figure 2: Examples of actions the London boroughs have committed to in their RRP



Source: London borough RRP (2018). The full index of actions committed to by London boroughs in their RRP is available at <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/waste-plans>.

Although collaborative efforts involving boroughs, community groups, BIDs and NGOs were common to maximise potential reach and impact, there is an opportunity going forward for more alignment. Coordination between the different

groups would help to ensure there is **one clear voice for London** on plastic reduction and **consistent messaging** around actions citizens can take to reduce single-use plastic and the alternatives that are available.

BOX 5: IDENTIFYING EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

During our review we identified examples of research to assess the impact of actions on self-reported, intended behaviour change. For example, evaluative research carried out following the National Refill Day 2019 public advertising campaign in rail stations found that that 28% of those that were presented with the advert intended to download the Refill app.

By contrast, we uncovered very few examples of research to determine the impact of actions on either municipal waste or CO²e emissions (although it should be noted that some London boroughs did make commitments in their RRP to carry out waste analysis following certain actions)

ACTION OPPORTUNITY: informing and inspiring citizens with one consistent voice

London's boroughs, BIDs, community groups and NGOs should connect with the London Recycles campaign to develop and deliver consistent messaging to London's citizens on actions they can take to reduce single-use plastic and to raise awareness of existing infrastructure and plastic reduction solutions in London.

3.2 Pledge schemes influencing local businesses

Our review identified a variety of different actions which aimed to encourage businesses to reduce the amount of single-use plastic they put on the market. These included organisation and community behaviour change pledge schemes, the establishment of 'Low Plastic' or 'Plastic Free' zones, award schemes for businesses to encourage better practices (for example, the City of London Corporation's Clean City Awards Scheme), and the production and dissemination of good practice case studies for businesses.

In this section we focus exclusively on organisation or community pledge schemes active in London prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, of which there were many. A summary of the key ones is available below in Table 3.

All these schemes required businesses to make a series of voluntary commitments with respect to the single-use plastic they provide or sell, or the solutions they offer. In return, they were awarded an accreditation, or were publicly endorsed or profiled in some way. In some cases, and where specific thresholds were met, whole areas or communities could also be awarded an accreditation.

It should be noted that while all these schemes shared a common desired outcome, they did not all have the same central driver or motivator. For example, some were concerned with reducing leakage of plastic from cities into riverine and ocean environments, whilst others were concerned with reducing municipal waste.

Table 3: Key pledge schemes active in London pre-pandemic

NAME	DETAIL
<p>UK Plastic Pact Led by WRAP with the support of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation</p>	<p>A UK initiative to unite the plastic packaging value chain behind a common vision and targets. The Plastic Pact identified eight problematic and unnecessary single-use items to be removed by signatories by the end of 2020, with a further 19 items and materials on a list for further investigation. As of the time of writing, there were 149 members.</p>
<p>Plastic Free Communities Surfers Against Sewage (SAS)</p>	<p>A UK wide initiative with a strong presence in London. Five objectives must be met to achieve Plastic Free Community certification:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organisation of two community events. 2. Engagement of local groups and organisations. 3. A set number of businesses in the community (the target is determined based on the community population size) must remove at least three single-use plastic items. Businesses then get awarded a 'Plastic Free Champion' plaque. 4. A resolution must be passed by the local borough committing to taking action itself to remove single-use plastic items and support plastic free initiatives in the area. 5. A steering group, comprised of a local group of stakeholders, must be established to set direction and provide accountability. <p>At the time of writing there appeared to be two certified communities in London, including Canary Wharf, and 39 communities in progress. For more details on how Highgate Society has been working to establish a Plastic Free Community in Crouch End, see Box 5.</p>
<p>Plastic Free City City of London Corporation</p>	<p>Businesses must pledge to take at least four actions from a list (most of the actions are to remove an item of single-use plastic; there is also an action to make tap water refills available, to offer a discount to customers with reusable coffee cups, and to introduce a stationery recycling scheme). Those that pledge five or six actions are awarded a gold pledge, those that pledge seven or more are awarded a platinum pledge. 110 businesses have pledged, representing over 100,000 employees.</p>

NAME	DETAIL
Blue Turtle Shaftesbury	<p>This initiative sought to inspire food and beverage tenants in the Carnaby area (in London’s West End) to reduce single-use plastic and adopt more sustainable practices. To be awarded Blue Turtle accreditation, tenants are required to make a pledge to eliminate a list of single-use plastic products, provide free tap water access to encourage refill, reduce waste, and source seafood sustainably. A toolkit, which provides tenants with information on where to source products, services and suppliers, was distributed. As of the time of writing 50 businesses had made the pledge. (For more details, see page 23).</p>
Low Plastic Zones North London Waste Authority ²⁶ (NLWA)	<p>There are six participating areas across six boroughs working towards Low Plastic Zone status. To achieve ‘Low Plastic Zone’ accreditation local businesses must commit to eradicating a minimum of one single-use plastic item from a list, which was identified following an on-the-ground assessment of the area. A list of recommended alternatives for each of these items is provided by NLWA. For an area to be accredited with Low Plastic Zone status more than 50% of businesses operating in the area need to have achieved the status.</p>
Hackney Low Plastic Zone Dalston London Borough of Hackney	<p>This is a spin-off of the NLWA Low Plastic Zone, but with a slightly different entry threshold. Local businesses on Kingsland High Street in Dalston were required to remove at least two single-use plastic items from a list. 26 local businesses joined the scheme.</p>
Plastic Free Midtown The Evening Standard	<p>Businesses in the Midtown area of London – which includes Holborn, St Giles, Bloomsbury, Farringdon and the Clerkenwell districts – can take the ‘Plastic Free Pledge’ and commit to taking one or more of several actions including banning single-use plastic bags, supplying glass water bottles and cups, and real crockery and cutlery.</p>
#OneLess Pioneer Network Zoological Society of London	<p>A London based campaign calling on businesses, venues and visitor attractions to pledge to stop the sale of single-use bottled water from across retail and operations and replace with refill options such as drinking fountains. 80 organisations have made this commitment.</p>
Refill London Communities City to Sea	<p>The Refill campaign aims to increase access to drinking water in London, encouraging businesses across the capital to offer free drinking water and showcase their refill point on an app, which consumers can use to find the locations. As of the time of writing, there were 3,600 refill stations on the app and 37 community schemes in London, each of which engage and activate local businesses. The majority of these were borough led.</p>

Source: ReLondon analysis.

Despite some different central motivations, the schemes all targeted a similar assortment of single-use plastic consumable items, typically straws, bags, cups, stirrers, bottles, cutlery and bowls, as well as plastic food packaging and containers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Single-use plastic items targeted by key pledge schemes

SCHEME	Straws	Bags	Cups	Stirrers	Water bottles	Cutlery	Crockery	Food packaging or containers	Other
Plastic Free Communities	Any three items, not specified								
Plastic Free City	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Blue Turtle	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
North London Waste Authority Low Plastic Zones	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Hackney Low Plastic Zone Dalston	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Plastic Free Midtown		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
#OneLess Pioneer Network					✓				
Refill London community Schemes					✓				

Source: ReLondon analysis.

Most pledge schemes provided some instructions or guidance on what participants or signatories were expected to do to achieve a reduction in use of the target single-use plastic items. However, in some instances these were broad and perhaps overly simplistic – for example, ‘switch to non-plastic alternatives’. Alternatives to single-use plastic are not all equal; where they involve replacing the single-use plastic with either a reusable vessel or another material, they come with their own environmental costs both in terms of production as well as end of life disposal. There is a hierarchy, which should be followed with substitution considered only as a last resort.

To mitigate unintended consequences – such as the adoption of alternatives that shift the resource burden elsewhere²⁷ or that do not integrate with recycling and waste systems in place in London (for example, compostable plastic, which cannot at present be dealt with in either the food waste stream or the non-food waste compost stream in London and would end up in final disposal routes)²⁸ – it is important that pledge schemes offer as much evidence-based guidance as possible to participants. This guidance needs to be in line with the waste hierarchy, and set out what to do to achieve a reduction in use of the target items in question, recognising that alternatives must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Guidance is particularly important for smaller businesses, which do not always have the time or resources to undertake research into alternatives. Where there is doubt, ReLondon or WRAP²⁹ should be consulted.



IN MORE DETAIL: Plastic Free Crouch End

About: Highgate Society is a voluntary organisation, based in the London Borough of Haringey, that has been working since 2016 to achieve Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) Plastic Free Community status in Crouch End, north London.

Outreach: Members of the Highgate Society have visited every business in Crouch End (200+) as part of outreach efforts. All were concerned and wanted to do something. Lack of information about which replacements or alternatives to use has been a real barrier for many small businesses. In some cases, solutions like VegWare, which cannot currently be composted in London (except in certain closed loop systems) and which instead end up in final disposal routes, were adopted. Attractive promotional materials (for example, posters and leaflets) produced by SAS were a great asset, as was the legitimacy conferred by a connection with a well-known organisation like SAS.

Targets and thresholds: All businesses were asked to eliminate at least three single-use plastic items. The threshold for community accreditation (based on Crouch End being a community of 10,000 people) was six businesses. The NLWA was implemented its Plastic Free Zone scheme in the same area. Their criteria were different; businesses had to commit to removing just one item, but the threshold for community accreditation was higher, at 50%.

Impact: Highgate Society has not yet been awarded the Plastic Free Community accreditation. They were waiting for Haringey Council to pass a motion saying they are committing to going single-use plastic free, and this did not happen until September 2020. All other criteria were met, including securing commitments from six businesses to remove three single-use plastic items. No follow up has yet taken place with these six businesses.

IN MORE DETAIL: Blue Turtle

About: The Blue Turtle initiative was established in 2019 as a partnership between West End property owner Shaftesbury and Project Zero, a marine conservation charity. It aimed to reduce the consumption of single-use plastic in Carnaby, as part of a wider theme of ocean protection, with a focus on front-of-house single-use plastic used by hospitality operators. Participating restaurants, bars and cafés made a pledge to eliminate avoidable single-use plastics, reduce waste and source only sustainable seafood. Once businesses committed to adopting these pledges and undertaking a self-audit, they are awarded a Blue Turtle accreditation to display.

Design: Developing the criteria for accreditation was a challenge; they wanted to do something that was demonstrably impactful at the time, but also realistic. Businesses in the area were starting from different points, which made it difficult to develop targets and entry thresholds that worked for everyone.

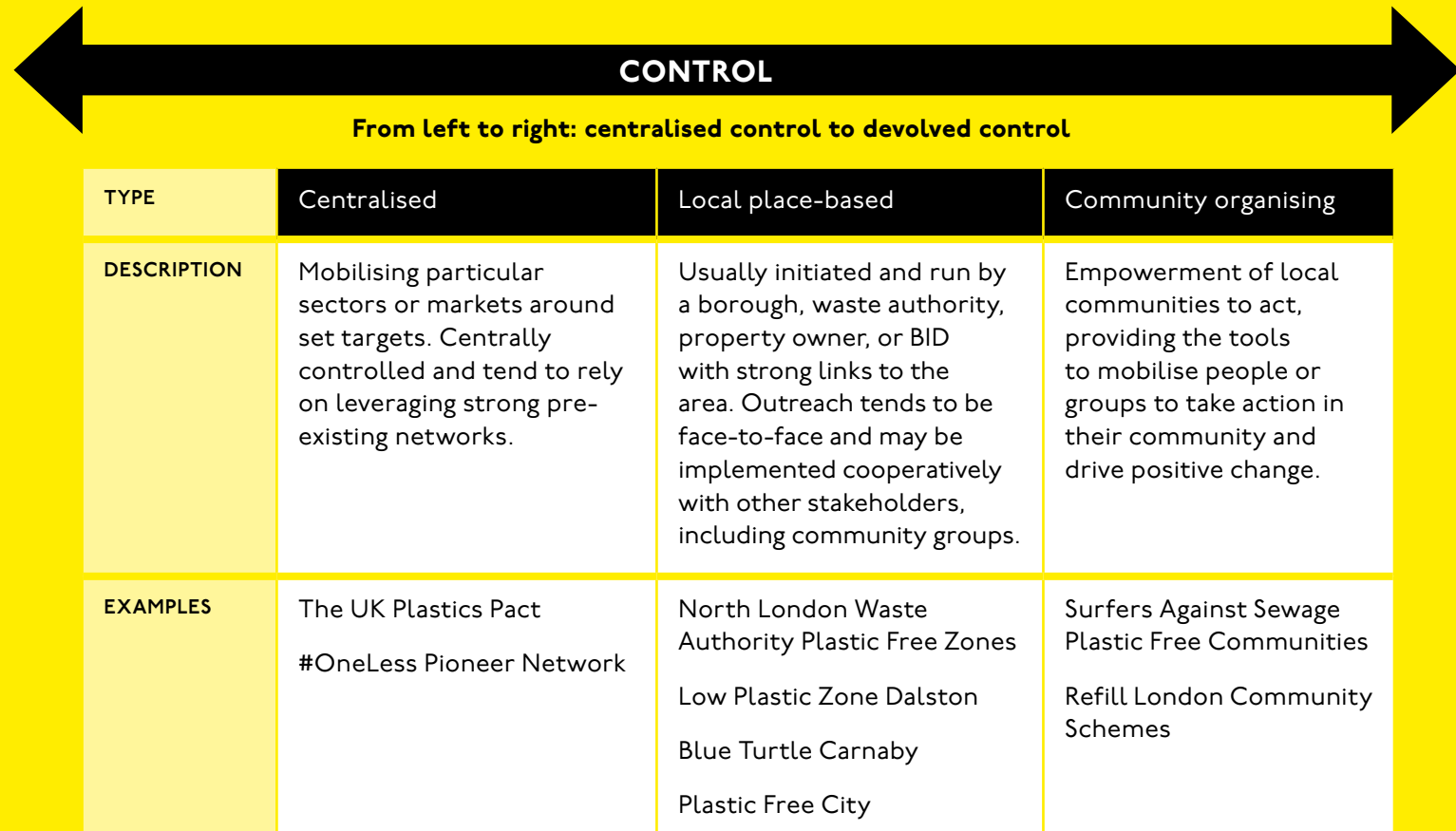
Challenges: Some retailers struggled to understand what changes they were allowed to make from a health and safety perspective. There was also confusion about substitutions and using different materials, and no catalogue of case studies and good practice from which hospitality operators could draw from. Accordingly, Shaftesbury produced a guidance toolkit which included supplier suggestions for replacement products, however this was challenging to keep up to date, given the high turnover of products.

Benefits and impact: More than 30 organisations in Carnaby have made the pledge and received Blue Turtle accreditation, meaning that they are committed to taking action to reduce plastic waste. However, there remain some challenges to address as the scheme develops. For example, follow-up audits were not carried out, largely due to the high uptake of the scheme which would have made this very resource intensive (although there were some instances of customer monitoring via social media). Accordingly, there is currently limited data on or the impact that they had on single-use plastic consumption. The scheme has also been impacted considerably by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

These pledge schemes are voluntary and non-binding. They were designed, spear-headed and implemented by a range of stakeholders, including NGOs, community groups, London boroughs, property owners, business improvement districts (BIDs), and in one case, a media group. They are, for the most part, complementary, taking a range of forms, operating in different geographies, and appealing to distinctive target audiences.

Figure 4 is a visual description of the different types of pledge schemes we encountered. From left to right the spectrum moves from schemes that are centrally controlled and seek to mobilise particular sectors or markets around specific targets; to local schemes with a specific geographic focus that are typically managed by a London borough or stakeholder with strong links to the local area; to schemes that seek to mobilise people-power at a community level.

Figure 4: Spectrum of organisational behaviour change pledge schemes



Source: ReLondon analysis with framework adapted from New Economics Foundation (2017).³⁰

While these schemes are complementary, they did not always appear to be well coordinated or synchronised. This has resulted in some instances of duplication – particularly amongst the local place-based and community schemes (see Figure 5 for one example of where multiple schemes have been implemented in the same geographical area).³¹

It has also led to a potentially confusing assortment of different entry thresholds for both businesses and ‘Low Plastic’ or ‘Plastic Free’ areas, some of which seem unambitious, and others of which do not go beyond what is now mandated by UK law since the ban on plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds came into force in England in October 2020.

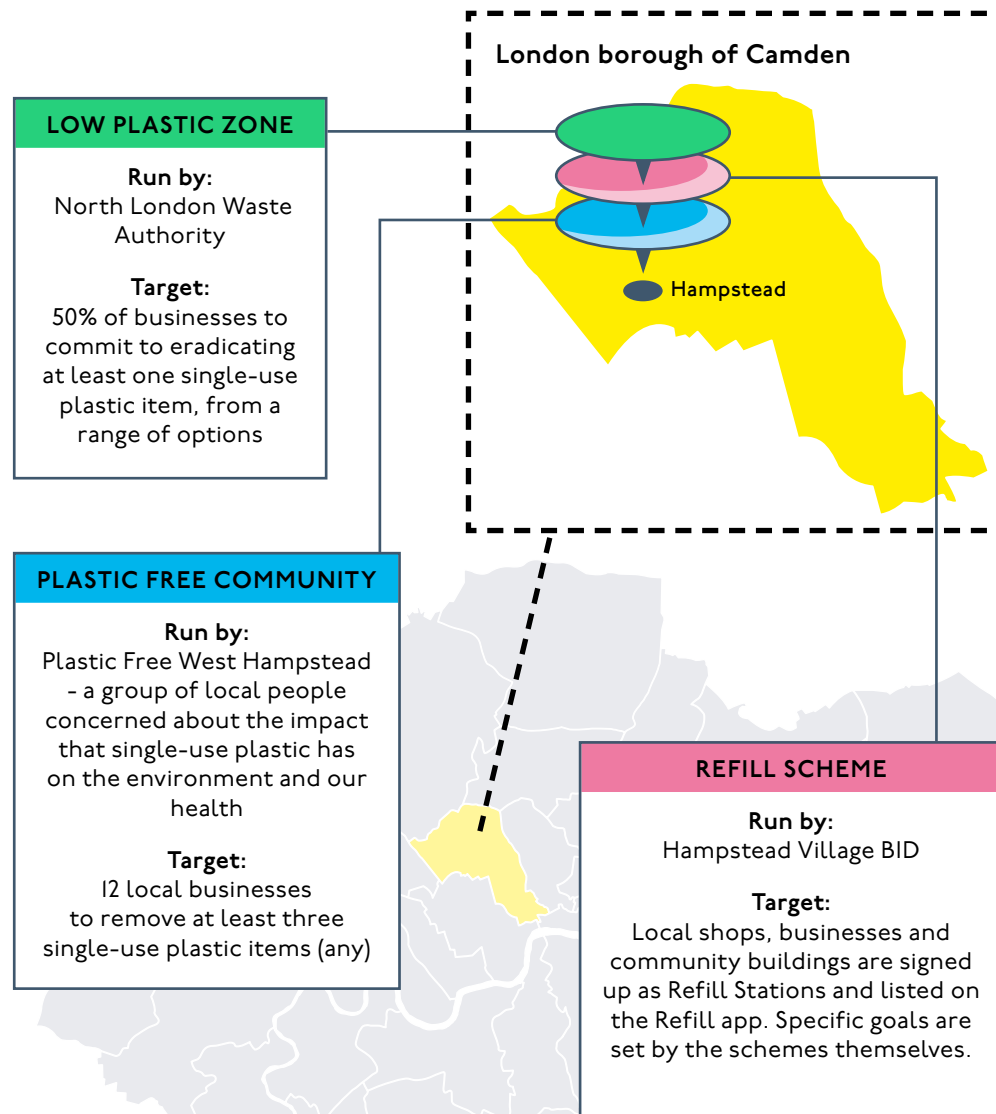
The Blue Turtle scheme (active in Carnaby in London’s West End), for example, required that businesses commit to eliminating all avoidable single-use plastic products by 2022, including water bottles, straws, cutlery, takeaway containers, coffee cups and lids, food packaging, bowls, and cups. By contrast, businesses on Kingsland Road were required to commit to just two actions from a long list to join the ‘Low Plastic Zone’ in Dalston,³² and businesses are

required to commit to eliminating single-use plastic water bottles only, in order to join the #OneLess Pioneer Network.

Entry thresholds for ‘Plastic Free’ or ‘Low Plastic’ areas were similarly varied. Highgate Society needed just six businesses in the Crouch End area to eliminate three single-use plastic items to qualify as a ‘Plastic Free Community’. By comparison, the NLWA required that 50% of businesses take just one action from a list for ‘Low Plastic Zone’ designation.

It is undoubtedly the case that striking the right balance between realism and ambition is challenging, particularly for specific geographical areas which likely contain businesses at vastly different starting points. However, this variation has the potential to be confusing when different schemes are being implemented in the same area (see Figure 5). It also means that businesses that operate across multiple locations may be being asked to do different things across their branches. Very low thresholds for ‘Plastic Free’ accreditation also risk masking a need for more ambitious measures – legislative or otherwise.

Figure 5: Pledge schemes active in the Hampstead area pre-pandemic



Source: ReLondon analysis.

Although coordination between the various schemes appeared to be lacking in some cases, we did encounter plenty of instances of collaboration within schemes. The Evening Standard worked with Midtown BID, for example, to roll out Plastic Free Midtown. Many of the London borough RPs contained commitments to work with local community groups, NGOs and BIDS to implement the Refill scheme. And to gain Surfers Against Sewage's (SAS) Plastic Free Community status, local groups must be engaged, and the borough must pass a resolution committing to supporting plastic free initiatives in the local area. That said, there is scope for more alliances and joint efforts, particularly with respect to the implementation of place-based and community-schemes. We received feedback anecdotally from one community group that their efforts would have been strengthened had the local borough been actively involved.

BOX 6: IDENTIFYING EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

- Almost all the organisations running pledge schemes had published data on the number of commitments made. However, not all the schemes carried out follow-ups to assess whether commitments had turned into actions or to measure the impact of the actions that were taken. Several factors are responsible for this:
 - First, the pandemic has made face-to-face follow up challenging and many businesses were closed for large periods of 2020 and into 2021.
 - Second, monitoring can be a resource intensive process, particularly where schemes have been successful and have many signatories.
 - Third, monitoring relies almost entirely on the goodwill of signatories to share data.
 - Finally, gathering the data can, of itself, be a complex process.
- The data that are available suggest that these schemes have been successful at encouraging businesses across London to reduce the amount of single-use plastic items and packaging they place on the market. WRAP's Plastic Pact published a progress tracker in 2019 reporting achievements and progress towards each of their four Pact targets. They reported a 40% reduction in the number of problematic or unnecessary items sold by Pact members in 2019 compared to 2018.³³ The #OneLess campaign estimates that their 80 Pioneer Network members have collectively removed five million plastic bottles from shops, events, and supply chains since 2016. Canary Wharf Group, a SAS Plastic Free Community, reported that 1.4 million items of single-use plastic were eliminated in the first year of their plastic programme. And the City of London Corporation estimates that over 20 million straws, cups, cutlery, bottles of water and takeaway containers were avoided across all businesses in the year from April 2019 to 2020 as a result of their Plastic Free City scheme.
- Data reported are usually unit data of single-use plastic items or packaging that have been removed from the market or prevented from being sold. It is important to note that these data do not allow for assessment of the wider materiality impact of any given change or solution (i.e. it may be that one million plastic lunch containers have been removed, but it could be the case that they have been replaced by one million compostable containers). Nor do they provide any insight into the impact on municipal waste or CO₂e emissions. It is also challenging to attribute causality in an environment where there is so much activity underway to reduce single-use plastic consumption. Additionally, there is a risk of double counting between schemes.
- There were some examples of case studies being produced and shared: The #OneLess campaign published 15 case studies and ran several learning events for their signatories to encourage sharing of good practice and peer-to-peer learning; SAS published stories on their websites showcasing some of the actions being taken by Plastic Free Communities around the UK; and the City of London organised best practice meetings for their signatories. That said, there is still much more that could be done to capture and disseminate examples of good practice in London and build a centralised repository. The owners of the pledge schemes have a unique opportunity to facilitate this and share learning.



These schemes have delivered positive benefits. The data that we identified during our review suggest that they have been successful at encouraging businesses across London to reduce the amount of single-use plastic items and packaging they place on the market. More effort is however needed to build evidence of their impact on both municipal waste and CO₂e emissions in London (see Box 6 for more on identifying evidence of impact). They have also – in the case of the community schemes – mobilised citizens and local groups across the capital, providing them with the materials they need to engage with and influence businesses and other stakeholders in their community, as well as a clear and actionable roadmap to implement positive change. They have increased awareness amongst consumers and businesses alike about the need for action. And they have generated commitments by businesses, schools, and other organisations to act to reduce single-use plastic.

ACTION OPPORTUNITIES: pledge schemes influencing local businesses

- ◆ ReLondon should convene a Local Action Network to provide a level of coordination for the capital. The network should bring together stakeholders involved in influencing or mobilising action to reduce single-use plastic consumption in London, including London boroughs, community groups, NGOs, and BIDS, as well as relevant national initiatives such as the UK Plastic Pact.
- ◆ Once established, members of the Local Action Network (and other experts, as necessary) should discuss common targets and entry thresholds for ‘low plastic’ council-buildings, businesses, areas, zones or communities in London. The network should also work to ensure that action to reduce single-use plastic consumption aligns with local waste and recycling systems, forthcoming national legislation, and national initiatives such as the UK plastic pact.
- ◆ Members of the Local Action Network should work together to map existing low plastic areas, communities or zones in London to reduce the risk of duplicative efforts going forward.
- ◆ ReLondon, together with members of the Local Action Network and other partners as needed, should seek funding to carry out a collaborative demonstration project of a ‘low plastic’ building, business, zone or community, incorporating targets and thresholds as agreed by the Local Action Network. The demonstration project should be accompanied by robust monitoring and evaluation to understand the impact on municipal waste and CO₂e emissions. The demonstration project should showcase and assess the impact of a diverse portfolio of plastic reduction solutions.
- ◆ ReLondon, with the Local Action Network should develop a centralised open access case study hub for London, to assist with disseminating and amplifying good practice examples.

3.3 Influencing consumer choices

Levels of public awareness and concern about the scale of single-use plastic consumption and associated environmental impacts have risen in recent years. Meanwhile customers and employees have become more selective and discerning about the products they buy and the packaging used.

Pre-pandemic, both the public and private sector were increasingly taking steps to eliminate single-use plastic items and packaging and introduce (and in some cases incentivise) alternatives. Some of these actions were taken voluntarily, others as a result of becoming a signatory to one of the pledge schemes outlined in Section 3.2 or another such alliance.

It was beyond the scope of this report to undertake an extensive assessment of these actions in London. We can, however, identify a number of trends, summarised below. The sections that follow consider some of the actions that have been taken by both the public and private sector in more detail.

Trend 1: Substitution of single-use plastic packaging and other consumable single-use plastic items for alternative materials was common in both the retail and to-go food service sectors.

Trend 2: On-the-go or away-from-home refill solutions were starting to gain pace, particularly for single-use plastic water bottles and coffee cups. There

were 3,600 refill points in shops, coffee shops, cafes and restaurants across the capital,³⁴ a £5 million fund for more than 100 new public drinking fountains established by the Mayor of London and Thames Water, and half of the top 20 UK to-go coffee providers offered a discount to incentivise consumers to bring their own refillable cup. We encountered a few examples of to-go food providers offering a discount for bringing a refillable lunchbox too. Many retailers – both large and small – had established in-store refill offers.

Trend 3: Takeback reuse models were becoming increasingly more established for drink cups consumed on-the-go or out-of-home – in both closed environments, like offices and venues, as well as open environments, like the high street. Some nascent ‘lunchbox’ reuse solutions had emerged for to-go food packaging at street markets, but these were still at pilot stage. There was evidence of good progress with establishing takeback services for reusable packaging for home grocery deliveries, too; Terracycle launched Loop in the UK³⁵, which sells a selection of groceries for home delivery in reusable packaging, and several smaller providers including Abel & Cole and Good Club offered a ‘decant at home’ service. However, solutions for home deliveries from restaurants or other eateries appeared scant.





3.3.1 London boroughs and the GLA group

The scale of the buying power of public sector bodies in London offers a key lever for reducing single-use plastic consumption and encouraging innovative approaches.

The GLA Group's Responsible Procurement Policy³⁶ outlines a commitment to using the GLA's extensive procurement activities – which amount to around £11 billion annually – to deliver lasting positive change. It includes specific commitments to give priority to circular procurement options and business models, to encourage material innovation in order to keep things in circulation for longer and reduce consumption of resources.

The Mayor of London outlined more specific internal commitments around single-use plastic in the LES, committing to phase out plastic bottle sales, remove single-use plastic in cafes and their facilities, and improve access to tap water across the GLA Group.

London boroughs have also taken steps to change the goods and services they procure. Their RRP, amongst other priorities, set out actions for reducing single-use plastic waste from their offices, borough-controlled buildings and events. Our review revealed a great deal of variation from borough to borough – Table 4 provides a select list of examples to illustrate the differing levels of ambition, targets and actions.

ACTION OPPORTUNITY: delivering on commitments

London boroughs should collectively communicate how they are delivering on actions set out in their reduction and recycling plans to change the goods and services they procure for their offices, borough-controlled buildings and events, showcasing good practice for others to emulate.

Table 4: Examples of London borough actions to reduce single-use plastic

LONDON BOROUGH	DETAILS OF COMMITMENT OR ACTION
City of London	Remove all single-use plastic (unless the alternative is worse) by April 2021.
Wandsworth	At least a 75% reduction in single-use plastic across borough operations by 2025.
Sutton	Requirement for all council-controlled buildings to cease supplying single-use plastic cutlery and plates, in favour of alternatives.
Lambeth	Through the Council's procurement process, suppliers will be required to set out how they will minimise waste and single-use plastic. Developed a Green Events Guide for event organisers in the borough, which includes the ban of bottled water at events and a list of undesirable serve-wear, including plastic cutlery and sauce sachets.
Barking and Dagenham	Plastic cups to be stopped and glasses introduced in all key Council buildings. Removal of plastic umbrella sleeves.
Lewisham	Removing single-use plastic cups and umbrella sleeves.

Source: ReLondon stakeholder questionnaire and interviews, London borough RRP (2018).

IN MORE DETAIL: Hackney Council

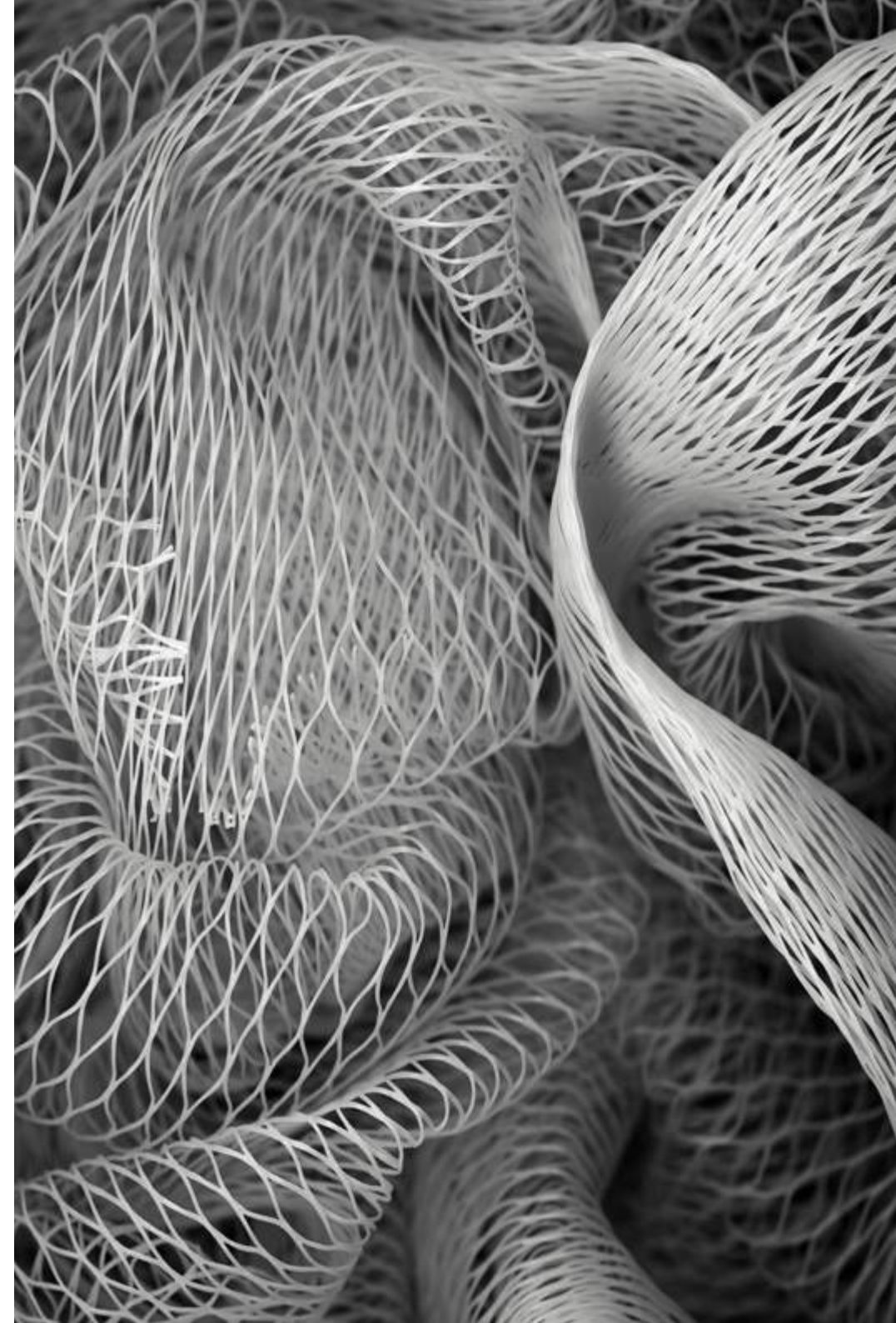
Hackney Council has taken a number of steps to reduce the consumption of single-use plastic within council-controlled buildings. These include:

- ♦ Replacing single-use plastic food containers, used in the canteen, with compostable plastic containers.
- ♦ Replacing single-use plastic milk pots with Tetra Pak.
- ♦ Replacing single-use aluminium coffee sachets with large coffee dispensers.
- ♦ For internal events, all single-use plastic items (for example, plates and cutlery) were replaced with reusable alternatives, which are washed and cleaned.
- ♦ Communications to encourage consumers to bring their own reusable lunch container and coffee cup.

As well as taking action to reduce single-use plastic in GLA Group and borough buildings, the Mayor of London and London boroughs have taken steps to facilitate refill behaviour in the public realm. They have supported the roll out of the Refill London campaign, which encourages businesses to offer free tap water and log their refill point on an app – so far there are 3,600 refill points logged across the city. And they have contributed to an increase in the number of public drinking fountains in London.³⁷ In 2018, the Mayor of London launched a £5 million fund with Thames Water to deliver more than 100 public drinking fountains across London from Spring 2019. Pre-pandemic the Mayor of London had installed 54 drinking fountains with Thames Water and 28 with the Zoological Society of London as part of their #Oneless Campaign. Collectively, under these two partnerships, 82 drinking fountains have been installed across 22 boroughs (including the City of London). Data collected from the 28 drinking fountains installed as part of the #OneLess campaign suggest they have been widely used. Taken as an average, 30,000 litres of water were dispensed from these drinking fountains every month, the equivalent of 15,000 500ml single-use drink bottles.³⁸

There were also examples of London boroughs trialling other refill solutions in their communities:

- ◆ Camden trialled a commercial refill station in January 2020 to increase opportunities for local citizens to refill certain products in the community; this was part funded by ReLondon. It operated for two days each week at Queens Crescent Market selling unpackaged cleaning and cleansing products. After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it introduced carbolic soaps, reusable and locally made facemasks, and refill dispensed hand sanitiser, all at affordable prices. Over a period of four months, the refill station prevented the use of 554 single-use containers and jars.
- ◆ Tower Hamlets worked with small coffee shops and businesses to encourage them to hand out reusable cups. Reusable cups were purchased for participating businesses to use. 60 local cafes signed up to the scheme, which engaged approximately 800 citizens between October 2019 and February 2020. The scheme was discontinued – partly as a result of the pandemic, but partly because materials and practical processes required to be undertaken, were too time-consuming for small independents.





3.3.2 Major to-go food outlets and coffee chains (UK-wide analysis)

An assessment carried out in 2019 of the top 20 UK food-to-go operators found significant variation across the sector in terms of how single-use plastic is used and the steps being taken to reduce consumption of single-use plastic consumable items.³⁹ 40% of operators assessed at the time offered free tap water as part of the Refill campaign; 65% of operators had removed plastic straws; 50% of the chains that served takeaway coffee offered a discount to encourage customers to bring their own refillable coffee cup; 53% of businesses offering coffee served it in reusable crockery; and there was one

example of a charge being used to disincentivise use of single-use coffee cups. Under a third of eat-in venues assessed provided reusable cutlery or reusable glasses for cold drinks.

3.3.3 Major retailers (UK-wide analysis)

According to a report by the Environmental Investigation Agency, all major UK grocery retailers have made commitments in principle to reduce plastic use. These are being achieved in large part through substitution and light-weighting, but a growing number are now trialling packaging free and refillable ranges in stores. Only limited attention has been given by major retailers to single-use packaging for 'on-the-

go' food options.⁴⁰ Tesco is the first major UK retailer to have established an e-commerce reuse offer – Loop, which was launched in the UK in 2020 in partnership with Terracycle and which sells a selection of groceries in reusable packaging which can be ordered online and delivered to and collected from homes.

ACTION OPPORTUNITY: convening for change

ReLondon, the GLA and London Councils should work together to encourage London stakeholders across the 'plastic' supply chain to contribute to the UK Plastics Pact targets, and drive the creation of exemplar plastic reduction projects at the city level.

3.3.4 Start-ups and small and medium businesses (SMEs)

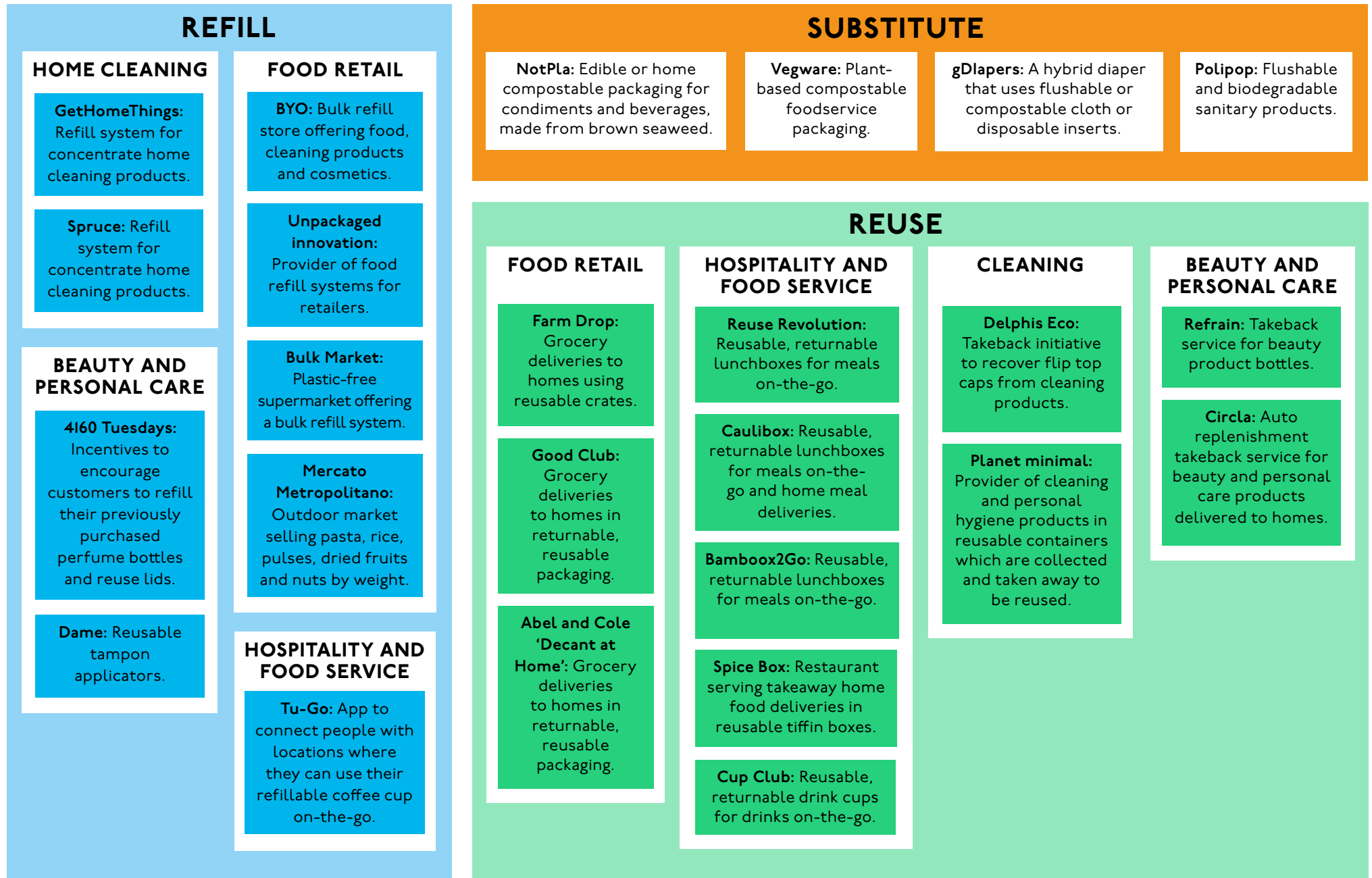
Pre-pandemic, an ecosystem of SMEs in London was developing innovative products and services to enable a reduction in single-use plastic consumption. These included: personal care and hygiene products made using substitute materials; refill systems for food retail, cleaning products, and beauty and personal care products; and takeback systems for reusable packaging (see Figure 6 for examples).

Takeback systems for reusable packaging were starting to become

more established for online food retail and on-the-go hospitality and food service. Systems for drink cups (for example Cup Club) were well established in both closed and open environments. Systems for on-the-go lunch containers were by comparison still fairly immature and small scale, or at pilot stage. Caulibox, for example, piloted a reusable lunchbox service towards the end of 2019 at Tachbrook street market in Westminster with 10 participating vendors. Reuse solutions for single-use plastic packaging used for home food deliveries from restaurants and other eateries were scant, but there have been some promising signals of change in recent months including a successful trial in February 2020 by Caulibox of a reuse delivery platform for restaurant takeaways.

ReLondon's Business Transformation Programme⁴¹ has been allocated £900,000 from the Mayor of London's Green New Deal⁴² to support circular SMEs in London to recover from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to this funding, ReLondon is able to offer grants to SMEs, with the aim of maintaining London's diverse ecosystem of low carbon, circular businesses and promoting a green recovery post-COVID-19. The Green New Deal is the Mayor's £10 million investment in green projects that will support around 1,000 green jobs to boost London's economic recovery and tackle the twin dangers of air pollution and the climate emergency.

Figure 6: Examples of SMEs in London offering solutions to single-use plastic packaging



Source: ReLondon business transformation programme SME beneficiaries.

BOX 7: IDENTIFYING EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Impact data reported were usually unit data of single-use plastic items or packaging that had been removed from the market, or uptake of a particular solution (e.g. litres of water dispensed from a drinking fountain).

We did not identify any evidence of the impact of a given change on municipal waste or CO₂e emissions over the course of our review.

Assessing the relative carbon footprint of an alternative to single-use plastic is complex as all alternatives have environmental impacts as a result of their production and end-of-life disposal.

ACTION OPPORTUNITY: defining impact

All organisations active in delivering single-use plastic reduction projects should take steps to build evidence of the impact of their plastic reduction interventions on both municipal waste and CO₂e emissions in London. This could be consolidated by ReLondon through the Local Action Network.





4

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



4. THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

4.1. On single-use plastic consumption

Use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by citizens, most of which is at least partially made with a plastic polymer, has surged. YouGov's COVID-19 data monitor⁴³ reported a 76% increase, between March 2020 and January 2021, in the number of people in the UK who say they are wearing a face mask in public places. Waste composition analysis carried out by ReLondon across 10 estates in London during one week in October 2020 (see Box 8 for more details) counted 1,300 disposable face masks across all waste streams, averaging one mask per household per week. Scaled to Greater London, this would equate to approximately 3.5 million masks per week, 185 million per year, and over 1,000 tonnes of additional waste each year (and this would only account for those masks disposed of in household collections, not those disposed of in street litter or at work). There have also been reports of an increase in demand for packaging for alcohol-based sanitiser, as well as other hygiene products such as soap and bleach.⁴⁴

BOX 8: WASTE COMPOSITION ANALYSIS

ReLondon carried out an extensive waste composition analysis between June 2018 and October 2020, measuring waste from 1,663 households across 10 estates with purpose-built flats in London. Comparing the data from June 2019 and October 2020 offered an opportunity to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on household waste. The week of waste composition analysis carried out in mid-October 2020 was not carried out during a national lockdown; rather it was conducted when children were back in schools and when many workers were still working from home. It may, therefore, be representative of a new 'normal'.

Beyond PPE and other COVID-19 related waste it is difficult to establish with any certainty the impact of the pandemic on single-use plastic consumption in either the short or long term. Here we outline a number of key trends which we observed during our desk-based review. A combination of an ever-changing situation in England with respect to COVID-19 restrictions and interventions, and significant uncertainty about the outlook for business recovery, make predicting the longevity of these trends challenging.

How and where people consume has shifted since the start of the pandemic. They are spending more time at home, less time in the office,⁴⁵ and less time in hospitality and food service businesses (which have been closed for considerable periods of 2020 and 2021). Food retail has experienced positive growth during the pandemic and will likely continue to remain at inflated levels while homeworking continues and the hospitality sector remains under restrictions.⁴⁶ People are also doing more of

their shopping online; retail sales online accounted for 19% of total sales in February 2022, compared to 36% in November 2020.⁴⁷ There has also been a significant uptick in home food deliveries as a result of closures of the hospitality sector for long periods of both 2020 and 2021, as well as an increase in the number of restaurants offering takeaway services.⁴⁸ UK Just Eat takeaway orders rose by almost 400% in fourth quarter of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.⁴⁹

Data suggests that single-use plastic consumption in the home has increased, although there appears to be variation across products and packaging types:

- In a survey implemented by the NLWA in 2020, 16% of respondents said that their use of single-use plastic had gone up during the pandemic. Delivery packaging was the top item to have increased in use (15%), followed by takeaway packaging (12%) and supermarket packaging (12%).⁵⁰
- ReLondon's waste compositional analysis (see Box 8) found that household polystyrene and posts, tubs and trays had increased when comparing pre- and post-pandemic samples. Conversely, decreases were observed for plastic bottles and plastic film.
- RECOUP reported "huge variations" across product ranges in retail, with retailers selling more long-life goods, but fewer convenience foods such as ready meals or sandwiches.⁵¹
- The British Plastic Federation reported that its members that supply packaging for food and drink (together with bleach, soap and medicines) were operating at record capacities.⁵²

Building a picture of what has happened to single-use plastic consumption out-of-home is more challenging.

The hospitality and food service sectors are among the most affected sectors by COVID-19 restrictions⁵³ and have been required to close for considerable periods during both 2020 and 2021. This may have resulted in an overall decrease in consumption in these settings, which at least partially offsets any increases in consumption in at-home settings. There is evidence that appears to back up this assumption: according to RECOUP's COVID-19 impact report, packaging manufacturers reported that demand for packaging for products consumed away from home, such as in hospitality, schools and travel hubs had reduced, whereas products purchased to consume at home had maintained consistent levels of demand.

However, many hospitality and food service businesses have pivoted to offering a takeaway service during lockdown. Many UK pubs that reopened following the first national lockdown in a takeaway context were, for example, serving drinks in plastic cups.⁵⁴ Thames clean-up charity Thames21 reported an increase in single-use plastic being littered and

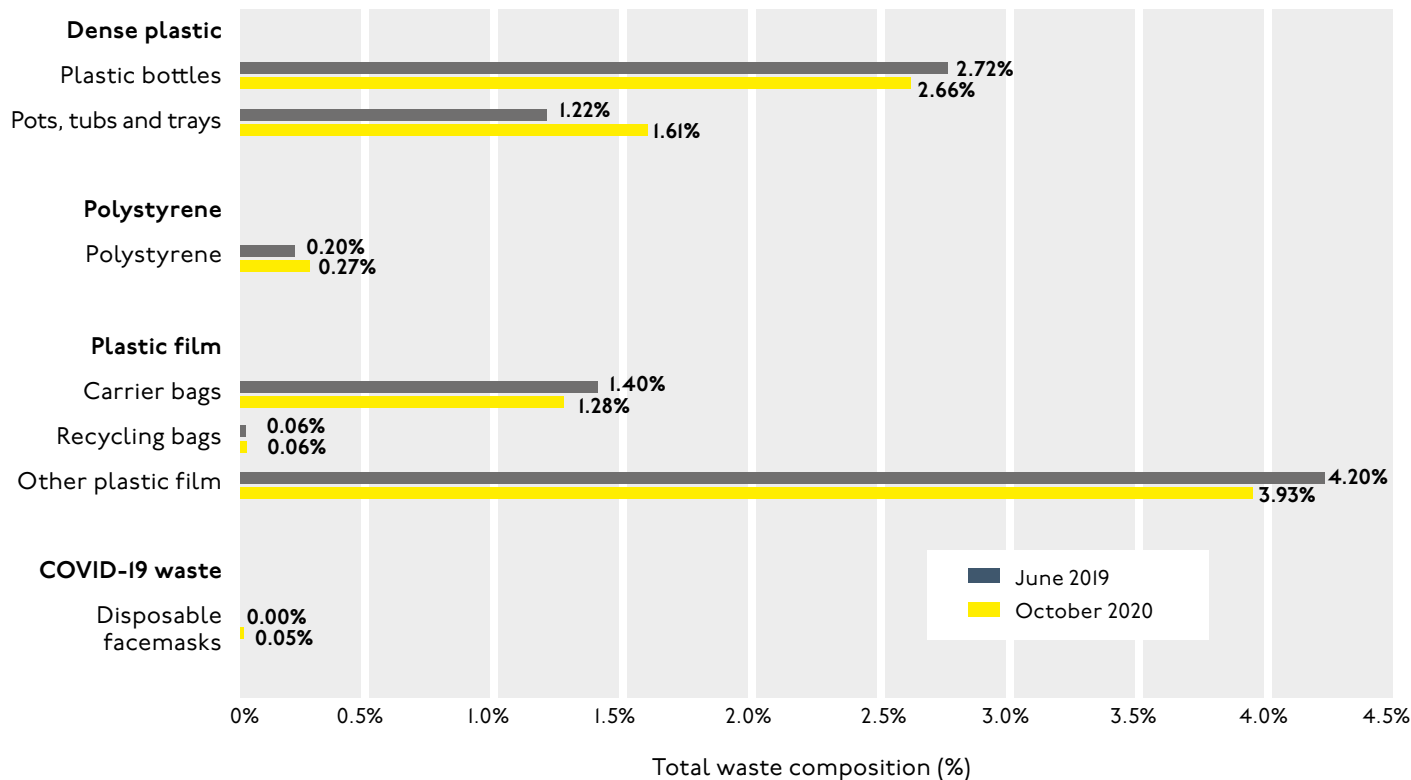
ending up in the river Thames during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 1,600 cups were recovered in three months between July and September 2020 from clean-ups in West London – twice as many as the same period the year before and despite the fact that pubs and restaurants were closed from March to early July.⁵⁵

Moreover, for those periods where the hospitality and food service sectors were able to open as usual, levels of consumption of single-use plastic were likely higher than pre-pandemic levels, owing to a pivot to disposables in order to counter

the risk of virus transmission, as well as pauses to policies around accepting refillables in stores. (See Section 4.2 for more on how the pandemic affected actions and activities underway to reduce single-use plastic consumption). When pub chains Wetherspoons, Greene King and McMullen's opened on 4 July 2020 following the first national lockdown, they introduced individually wrapped condiments and cutlery. The UK's FoodService Packaging Association reported in April that single-use cups and wrapped single-use cutlery "are in huge demand".⁵⁶



Figure 7: Composition of total waste from 1,663 households in London, comparing June 2019 and October 2020



Source: ReLondon research and analysis.

We do not know the longevity of these trends, but there are early indications that some, at least, may be here to stay. Research carried out by Waitrose, for example, suggests that the increase in the number of consumers doing their grocery shop online is “irreversible” and that habits are likely to have been altered permanently.⁵⁷ A survey of UK restaurants by delivery service City Pantry found that nearly a fifth have started offering takeaway services during the pandemic, and that 98% of all businesses are planning to continue offering takeout food once lockdown is eased.⁵⁸ Nor do we know what impact the pandemic might have on consumer confidence in using reusables and refillables. A survey implemented by NLWA in 2020 gives some indication of current attitudes: 21% reported that while they are concerned about plastic pollution, health is more important, so they are happy to use more single-use plastic for now. And 28% reported that they think it is safer to buy food in plastic packaging, rather than loose, because it is protected.⁵⁹

As the vaccine programme is rolled-out and the economy re-opens, it will be important to establish how Londoners’ attitudes towards single-use plastic and refill and reuse have altered, and work to rebuild confidence.

ACTION OPPORTUNITY: support the development of solutions for packaging used in home food deliveries and food to go

ReLondon, along with their strategic partner EMF, should leverage their networks to facilitate the piloting and scale-up of innovative solutions to single-use plastic packaging for home food deliveries and food to-go (sectors bolstered by the COVID-19 pandemic).

ACTION OPPORTUNITY: understanding attitudes

ReLondon should carry out research to understand Londoners’ attitudes towards single-use plastic, and refill and reuse solutions, and how they might have changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, building on initial polling undertaken by the GLA in June 2020.

4.2 On actions to reduce single-use plastic use in London

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and subsequent Government restrictions brought about a cessation of many – but certainly not all – activities that were underway in London to reduce single-use plastic consumption. Amid closures of many sectors of the economy for prolonged periods, a transition to large scale home working, and public health and hygiene concerns, public drinking fountains temporarily closed and contracts for many takeback reuse solutions were terminated or paused. Retailers and coffee chains ceased accepting refillable containers and removed front-of-house water refill points, while policies on offering reusables in restaurants, coffee chains and other eateries were abandoned, in lieu of compulsory single-use alternatives.⁶⁰ The closure of businesses combined with social distancing guidelines also put the brakes on efforts to roll out place-based or community pledge schemes which relied on direct face-to-face outreach and engagement. There were also delays to the introduction of UK Government legislation to ban single-use plastic straws, cotton buds and stirrers, and a temporary change to the single-use plastic carrier bag charge in England, which suspended the charge for bags used in online groceries from March to September 2020.

At this stage, it is difficult to assess the long-term consequences of these disruptions on business behaviour.

There have been welcome signs of high street food service operators re-implementing previous policies on refillables – Costa Coffee, for example, started accepting refillable coffee cups and water bottles in their stores in June 2020. There were also examples of some public drinking fountains in London reopening during the summer months of 2020 when national lockdowns were lifted. We also heard anecdotally from several sources that that COVID-19 disruptions had provided an opportunity to pause, reflect and improve upon or grow previous activities.

Nonetheless, with the roll-out of the vaccine programme in the UK and the lifting of restrictions, it will be important to act to ensure that the pivot to single-use consumables (which seemed particularly prevalent across the hospitality sector) does not become permanent. It is possible that the immediate financial impact of COVID-19 will be so acute that thinking will focus on cost cutting and rebuilding⁶¹ as opposed to picking up or progressing activities to reduce single-use plastic consumption. There is also a risk that for those solution providers at startup stage, negative revenue changes and lost contracts

during the pandemic may undermine their viability in the long term.⁶² This is why the Mayor of London's Green New Deal, and the £900,000 allocated from it to support the ReLondon Business Transformation Programme to support circular SMEs, is so important. It is also important to acknowledge here that should business behaviour revert to its pre-pandemic state, it does not necessarily follow that consumer behaviour will.

ACTION OPPORTUNITY: collective post-COVID-19 messaging

London's boroughs, BIDs, community groups and NGOs should work with London Recycles to deliver a joined-up pan-London effort to 'socialise' refill behaviour once again and promote use of the refill app once COVID-19 restrictions have lifted and Londoners are out-and-about.

Brand new initiatives and activities were launched – largely in response to the increased use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and in an attempt to counter backsliding by some businesses on their single-use plastic reduction commitments – and we observed some efforts to pivot activities, adjusting to the changed circumstances. A few examples are outlined here:

- ♦ City to Sea's #ContactlessCoffee campaign, which provided fast-food outlets with simple advice on how to offer takeaway drinks in a reusable cup safely. The campaign resulted in hundreds of businesses accepting reusables again, including Costa Coffee and Starbucks UK.
- ♦ City to Sea's cross sector taskforce bringing together industry experts, scientists, businesses, retailers and epidemiologists to share best practice around operating with reusables during the pandemic.
- ♦ London's COVID-19 Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC) published a briefing note providing guidance on the use of drinking fountains, Refill London and reusable cups in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶³
- ♦ The #OneLess campaign's #LoveYourBottle social media campaign, which was implemented during the summer of 2020 as the first national lockdown eased, and which aimed to encourage London citizens to start using their refillable bottle again.
- ♦ Caulibox is close to launching a platform for reusable packaging for restaurant takeaways, following a successful trial in February 2021.



5

LEARNINGS FROM OTHER PLACES



5. LEARNINGS FROM OTHER PLACES

A scan of global action to reduce consumption of single-use plastic was undertaken as part of this research to provide inspiration and inform recommendations for London. In this section we consider three key trends that provide interesting and relevant inspiration, as well as insights and learnings, for London.

5.1 Local legislative measures

Cities – most notably in the USA – have used legislation as a key lever to drive bold reductions in single-use plastic consumption at the city level, introducing single-use plastic product bans and charges, along with changes to default options. Several examples from the US are listed below:

- ♦ **Concord:** A bylaw was passed in 2012 ending the sale of bottled water anywhere in the town of Concord, Massachusetts.⁶⁴
- ♦ **Portland:** The city of Portland in Oregon introduced an ordinance in 2018 restricting food service businesses from giving out single-use plastic service-ware, defined to include straws, stirrers, utensils, and condiment packaging, unless they were asked for. The rules apply to food delivery and takeout orders, as well as eat-in.⁶⁵
- ♦ **Berkeley:** An ordinance was introduced in Berkeley, California in 2019 requiring that food

vendors provide single-use plastic service-ware items, which includes straws, stirrers, utensils, condiment packaging and more, on request only. This applied to all establishments across the city, both those offering dine-in as well as takeaway services. The ordinance also introduced a 25 cent charge for disposable beverage cups and required food vendors offering onsite dining to only use reusable service-ware.⁶⁶

While the Mayor of London's powers to deliver change through local legislation are limited, the Mayor does have the opportunity to set a bold ambition and create a common and shared vision for the city through policy. He has declared – along with 28 London boroughs at the time of writing – a climate emergency and the LES sets out a commitment to significantly cut waste that is produced in the capital, with a focus on plastic bottles and coffee cups.



5.2 Reuse models

Our scan of global activities uncovered examples of reuse systems to replace certain single-use packaging items – most notably food delivery containers and coffee cups – which had scaled to a city or even regional scale.

- ♦ **reCIRCLE reusable lunch boxes:** reCIRCLE, a Swiss social enterprise founded in 2016, implemented a system of reusable lunch boxes that restaurants can offer for food eaten on-the-go, as well as home deliveries. Customers pay a deposit to use the reusable box and can redeem the deposit by returning the box to any of the restaurants that are part of the scheme. So far, 70,000 reCIRCLE boxes are being used by more than 400 restaurants across Switzerland, and in Stuttgart, Germany. The partnership between ReCIRCLE and several Swiss city administrations has resulted in an increase of ReCIRCLE's outreach to new restaurants, thus leading to a reduction of the waste generated in cities. For a start-up like ReCIRCLE, receiving the support of municipalities was key, as it gave consistency and credibility to the project.⁶⁷

- ♦ **Freiburg Cup:** In 2016, the German City of Freiburg and the public company in charge of waste prevention and collection services, launched the Freiburg Cup, a to-go reusable cup. 145 businesses (over 70% of the hospitality sector) participate in this scheme. Customers pay a 1 Euro deposit for the cup, which can be redeemed by returning the cup to any one of 100 stores in the city. These stores are responsible for cleaning the cup, each of which can be used up to 100 times. Participating stores have an identifying green sticker in the window. The initiative was backed by the Mayor of Freiburg and the cup has an iconic design, distinct to Freiburg. Other cities throughout Germany have expressed interest in replicating the program, as well as across the Our scan of global activities uncovered examples of reuse systems to replace certain single-use packaging items – most notably food delivery containers and coffee cups – which had scaled to a city or even regional scale.

In both examples, support was given by key city figures (for example, the Mayor of Freiburg, in the case of the Freiburg Cup), which appears to have played a role in scaling the reach of these initiatives and lending credibility.

In London, the LES committed to support campaigns and initiatives to cut the use of single-use packaging.

The Mayor of London has supported the Refill London tap water scheme and the roll out of public drinking fountains across the capital, and his support appears to have contributed to the success of both of these initiatives.



5.3. Engagement and convening

Our review of the international landscape revealed a number of different initiatives to bring together stakeholders, and either align them around common targets or mobilise action. Three examples are provided below:

- ♦ **Oslo's Plastic Manifesto:** The City of Oslo has launched a Plastic Manifesto to engage the private sector on plastic. The Plastic Manifesto is a declaration of intentions made by participating companies, outlining a company's plastic reduction targets and objectives. The City of Oslo (in partnership with other stakeholders) also provides participating companies with the tools, guidance and resources they need to successfully achieve the Manifesto's intentions. The Plastic Manifesto seeks to build on, rather than compete with, existing initiatives for public and private sector engagement on plastic, add concrete goals, whilst also providing the resources to help achieve these goals.⁶⁸
- ♦ **WWF Plastic Smart Cities:** Plastic Smart Cities is a global initiative run by WWF to engage and motivate cities around the world to set clear and attainable targets to reduce single-use plastic consumption and, therefore, leakage into marine environments. To join, cities must commit to no plastic in nature by 2030, develop an action plan within 6-months, and launch a pilot within a designated area with a goal to reduce plastic pollution by 30% within two-years. Cities are also expected to develop a monitoring plan and share progress.
- ♦ **Food delivery in France:** In February 2020, a group of 19 food delivery companies in France, including UberEats and Deliveroo, signed a charter committing to end the delivery of disposable cutlery from March 2020, set a 2022 target to use 100% recyclable packaging, and limit single-use plastic packaging to 50%. A French government committee will monitor the companies' progress every six months.⁶⁹

What is notable about these examples is the coordinated approach, often led by a figurehead, and the provision of clear targets around which stakeholders can align.

ACTION OPPORTUNITY: developing a common approach

ReLondon working with the GLA and the London boroughs, should develop an evidence-based blueprint for action towards a low plastic London, with recommendations for actions that can be taken by different stakeholder groups, to help align stakeholders around a common approach. The blueprint should be mindful of the UK Plastic Pact and forthcoming legislative changes.



6 ACTION OPPORTUNITIES



6. ACTION OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout this report, we have identified action opportunities, where our research points to an opportunity for building on or strengthening current efforts to reduce single-use plastic consumption in London. In this section we collate all these opportunities, organising them by theme (see Table 5).

While Table 5 presents the action opportunities as discrete interventions, many of them are connected and as such have the potential to deliver stronger outcomes when implemented together or in sequence. The convening of a Local Action Network for the capital should, for example, be carried out in parallel to the

development of a blueprint for action towards a low plastic London. And the implementation of demonstration projects to build evidence of impact should be carried out following the establishment of the Local Action Network and once a common approach has been agreed on.

The action opportunities set out in this section have the potential

to contribute to the delivery of the COVID-19 recovery missions developed by the GLA, which aim to use the recovery from the pandemic to reimagine the city as a place with a better long-term future for Londoners; one which is fairer, greener and more resilient than it was before.⁷⁰

Table 5: Action opportunities organised by theme

THEME	ACTION OPPORTUNITY
Public procurement	Deliver on commitments: London boroughs should collectively communicate how they are delivering on actions set out in their RRP to change the goods and services they procure for their offices, borough-controlled buildings and events, showcasing good practice for others to emulate.
Coordination and convening	Convene a Local Action Network: ReLondon should convene a Local Action Network to provide a level of coordination for the capital. The network should bring together stakeholders involved in influencing or mobilising action to reduce single-use plastic consumption in London, including London boroughs, community groups, NGOs, and BIDS, as well as relevant national initiatives such as the UK Plastic Pact.
	Align targets and entry thresholds across different 'low plastic' schemes: Once established, members of the Local Action Network (and other experts, as necessary) should discuss common targets and entry thresholds for 'low plastic' council-buildings, businesses, areas, zones or communities in London. The network should also work to ensure that action to reduce single-use plastic consumption aligns with local waste and recycling systems, forthcoming national legislation, and national initiatives such as the UK plastic pact.
	Map pre-existing efforts: Members of the Local Action Network should work together to map existing low plastic areas, communities or zones in London to reduce the risk of duplicative efforts going forward.
	Develop a common approach: ReLondon, working with the GLA and the London boroughs, should develop an evidence-based blueprint for action towards a low plastic London, with recommendations for actions that can be taken by different stakeholder groups, to help align around a common approach. The blueprint should be mindful of the UK Plastic Pact and forthcoming legislative changes.

THEME	ACTION OPPORTUNITY
	<p>Convene for change: ReLondon, the GLA and London Councils should work together to encourage London stakeholders across the plastic supply chain to contribute to the UK Plastics Pact targets and drive the creation of exemplar plastic reduction projects at the city level.</p> <p>Carry out a ‘low plastic’ pilot and build evidence of impact: ReLondon, together with members of the Local Action Network and other partners as needed, should seek funding to carry out a collaborative demonstration project of a ‘low plastic’ building, business, zone or community, incorporating more ambitious targets and thresholds as agreed by the Local Action Network. The demonstration project should be accompanied by robust monitoring and evaluation to understand impact on municipal waste and CO²e emissions. It should showcase and assess the impact of a diverse portfolio of plastic reduction solutions.</p> <p>Define Impact: All organisations active in delivering plastic reduction projects should take steps to build evidence of the impact of their plastic reduction interventions on both municipal waste and CO²e emissions in London. This could be consolidated by ReLondon through the Local Action Network.</p>
Business support	<p>Support the development of solutions for packaging used in home food deliveries and food to go: ReLondon, along with their strategic partner EMF, should leverage their networks to facilitate the piloting and scale-up of innovative solutions to single-use plastic packaging for home food deliveries and food to-go (sectors bolstered by the COVID-19 pandemic).</p>
Amplification	<p>Amplify good practice: ReLondon, with the Local Action Network should develop a centralised open access case study hub for London, to assist with disseminating and amplifying good practice examples</p>
Awareness raising	<p>Understand attitudes: ReLondon should carry out research to understand Londoners’ attitudes towards single-use plastic, and refill and reuse solutions and how they might have changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, building on initial polling undertaken by the GLA in June 2020.</p> <p>Collective post-COVID-19 messaging: London’s boroughs, BIDs, community groups and NGOs should work with London Recycles to deliver a joined-up pan-London effort to ‘socialise’ refill behaviour once again and promote use of the refill app once COVID-19 restrictions have lifted and Londoners are out-and-about.</p> <p>Inform and inspire citizens with one consistent voice: London’s boroughs, BIDs, community groups and NGOs should connect with the London Recycles campaign to develop and deliver consistent messaging to London’s citizens on actions they can take to reduce single-use plastic and to raise awareness of existing infrastructure and plastic reduction solutions in London.</p>

Source: ReLondon analysis. Work is currently underway by ReLondon to create a Circular Economy Route Map 2.0 for London, which will identify future policy and interventions needed to deliver London’s low carbon circular economy ambition. Findings and recommendations from this report will be incorporated into the Route Map 2.0, which is due to be published in 2022/23.⁷¹



7 CONCLUSIONS



7. CONCLUSIONS

London would benefit from efforts to coordinate and align action underway by different stakeholders to reduce single-use plastic consumption. Going forward, a city-wide 'blueprint' for plastic reduction, which provides guidance on, and recommendations for, actions that can be taken by different stakeholder groups, could help to achieve a common approach. This blueprint needs to:

- ♦ be rooted in what the evidence says about how plastic reduction interventions can deliver a reduction in municipal waste and CO₂e emissions;
- ♦ provide the full cost benefit of implementation;
- ♦ and ensure that plastic reduction interventions integrate with the recycling and waste systems in place in London.

The blueprint should also align with national activity such as the UK Plastic Pact and be mindful of forthcoming and proposed legislative changes affecting the packaging industry, such as proposals for extended producer responsibility and a deposit return scheme.

Efforts are needed to build evidence of the impact of plastic reduction interventions on municipal waste and CO₂e emissions in London. Demonstration projects, with robust monitoring and evaluation, will be key to amassing this evidence base and galvanising support for implementation of plastic reduction interventions. They can also provide proxy indicators / impacts for other activity happening in London.

London would benefit from consistent and coordinated messaging for citizens on actions they can take to reduce single-use plastic, which amplifies the full array of refill and reuse solutions available in London. London Recycles provides a platform for this that all stakeholders can get behind.

A pan-London effort may be required post COVID-19 to mitigate any negative impact that the pandemic might have had in terms of citizen consumption of single-use plastic. This might include:

- ♦ raising business ambition once again;
- ♦ supporting SME solution providers through the COVID-19 recovery period;
- ♦ facilitating the piloting and scale of new solutions for single-use plastic packaging used in online retail and food takeaway (sectors bolstered by the COVID-19 pandemic) and single-use face masks (a new COVID-19 related waste stream); and
- ♦ re-establishing consumer refill and reuse behaviours and re-building public confidence.

Any such effort must be evidence-based, and all actors must come together in a coordinated way.

References

- 1 WRAP (2017). National household waste composition 2017. Available at: <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/report/quantifying-composition-municipal-waste>.
- 2 Municipal waste is household or similar and usually arises in households, shops, offices, restaurants and hotels.
- 3 Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2019). Completing the Picture: How the Circular Economy Tackles Climate Change. Available at: www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications.
- 4 Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2019). Completing the Picture: How the Circular Economy Tackles Climate Change. Available at: www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications.
- 5 Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2016). The new plastics economy: rethinking the future of plastics and catalysing action. Available at: https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/publications/NPEC-Hybrid_English_22-II-I7_Digital.pdf
- 6 Jambeck et al. (2015). Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean. Science. Available at: <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/768>; and Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2016). The new plastics economy: rethinking the future of plastics and catalysing action. Available at: https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/publications/NPEC-Hybrid_English_22-II-I7_Digital.pdf
- 7 WRAP (2019). Plastics market situation report. Available at: <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/market-situation-reports/plastics-2019>.
- 8 WRAP (2017). National household waste composition 2017. Available at: wrap.org.uk/resources/report/quantifying-composition-municipal-waste.
- 9 Municipal waste is household or similar and usually arises in households, shops, offices, restaurants and hotels.
- 10 For information on London borough collections visit www.londonrecycles.co.uk
- 11 Ipsos MORI (2018). Polling club survey. Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/public-concern-about-plastic-and-packaging-waste-not-backed-willingness-act>
- 12 YouGov (2019). Most Brits support ban on harmful plastic packaging. Available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/consumer/articles-reports/2019/04/19/most-brits-support-ban-harmful-plastic-packaging>
- 13 GLA (2018). London Environment Strategy. Available at: www.london.gov.uk/.
- 14 Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/resources-and-waste-strategy-for-england>
- 15 ReLondon (2020). Business Plan 2020-2025. Available at: relondon.gov.uk/resources/business-plan-relondon-business-plan-2020-2025.
- 16 GLA (2020). London Recovery Program. Available at: www.london.gov.uk/.
- 17 Available at: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/waste-plans>.
- 18 More information available at: www.refill.org.uk/refill-london/.
- 19 More information available at: www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/5m-fund-for-hundreds-of-public-water-fountains-8. The Mayor of London and Thames Water both contributed £2.5 million to a £5 million fund which aims to install 100 drinking fountains across London, adding to the locations of existing drinking fountains.
- 20 The GLA, Transport for London, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, London Legacy Development Corporation and Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation. This Policy is also supported by the Metropolitan Police Service who are accountable to the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime. For the purposes of this policy the references to the GLA Group shall include the Metropolitan Police Service
- 21 Available at: data.london.gov.uk/dataset/waste-plans.
- 22 Adapted from: Systemiq and Pew (2019). Breaking the plastic wave. Available at: www.systemiq.earth/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BreakingThePlasticWave_MainReport.pdf; Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2018). Reuse – rethinking packaging. Available at: <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications/reuse>; Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2019). Upstream innovation. Available at: <https://plastics.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/upstream>.
- 23 Thornton's Budgens. Why Plastic Free? Available at: <https://www.thorntonsbudgens.com/plastic-free>
- 24 Chatham House (2015). Changing climate, changing diets: pathways to lower meat consumption. Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/CHHJ3820%20Diet%20and%20climate%20change%2018.II.I5_WEB_NEW.pdf.
- 25 Although some of the campaigns highlighted here were run during the pandemic, they stemmed from pre-pandemic campaigns.
- 26 NLWA is the waste disposal authority for the London boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest.
- 27 Imperial College London and Veolia UK. (2020). Veolia plastic whitepaper: examining material evidence, the carbon footprint. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344549657_Veolia_Plastic_White_paper.
- 28 ReLondon research
- 29 www.wrap.org.uk
- 30 New Economics Foundation and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2017). Enabling social action. Available at: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591797/A_description_of_social_action.pdf.
- 31 ReLondon plans to map all pledge schemes in the Greater London area over the coming year.
- 32 Actions listed on the sign-up form included: Encourage customers to bring their own bags, ask customers if they need a bag rather than automatically giving one, sell loose fruit and vegetables without any plastic packaging where possible, sell plastic free products where possible, sign up to the Refill London scheme, stock on-the-go water in cans or cartons, add a charge to customers not bringing their own cups, remove all plastic straws.
- 33 WRAP (2020). UK Plastics Pact Annual Report. Available at: <https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-12/The-UK-Plastics-Pact-Annual-Report-19-20.pdf>.
- 34 Registered on the Refill app.
- 35 More information available at: www.terracycle.com/en-US/about-terracycle/history.
- 36 GLA (2017). The GLA Group Responsible Procurement Policy. Available at: www.london.gov.uk/.
- 37 It is acknowledged that both private and third sector actors have installed public drinking fountains in public places too.
- 38 Data were collected by the #OneLess campaign and are an average of data collected from the 28 drinking fountains installed under the #OneLess campaign. More information available at: <https://www.onelessbottle.org/impact/>.
- 39 City to Sea and Eunomia (2020). Food-to-Go. Good to Go? Available at: www.citytosea.org.uk/campaign/food-to-go-report/.

- 40 Environmental Investigation Agency (2019). Checking Out on Plastics II: Breakthroughs and backtracking from supermarkets. Available at: eia-international.org/report/checking-out-on-plastics-ii/.
- 41 <https://relondon.gov.uk/business/>
- 42 <https://www.london.gov.uk/coronavirus/londons-recovery-coronavirus-crisis/recovery-context/green-new-deal>
- 43 The COVID-19 data monitor is available at: yougov.co.uk/covid-19.
- 44 Recoup (2020). The impact of Covid-19 across the plastic supply and recycling sectors. Available at www.recoup.org/download/760/recoup-covid-19-impact-report.; Wired (2020). The coronavirus pandemic has totally derailed the war on plastic. Available at: www.wired.co.uk/article/coronavirus-plastic-pollution-environment.
- 45 According to YouGov's COVID-19 data monitor, 26% of people in the UK are avoiding going to work as of February 2021, down from a high of 30% in April 2020, against a pre pandemic baseline of 2% at the start of March 2020.
- 46 ReLondon (2020). An assessment of the future impact of COVID-19 on commercial waste in London. Available at: relondon.gov.uk/resources/report-adapting-commercial-waste-services-to-covid-19.
- 47 Office for National Statistics (2020). Internet sales as a percentage of total retail sales (ratio) (%). Available at: www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/timeseries/j4mc/drsi.
- 48 City Pantry (2020). COVID-19 and the hospitality industry. Available at: blog.citypantry.com/blog/.
- 49 Partridge, J (2020). Just Eat Takeaway orders soar on back of European lockdowns. Available at: www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jan/13/just-eat-takeaway-orders-soar-on-back-of-european-lockdowns-covid.
- 50 NLWA (2020). 102 million disposable facemasks thrown away in UK. Available at: [https://www.nlwa.gov.uk/news/102-million-disposable-facemasks-thrown-away-uk-each-week-would-cover-wembley-pitch-232-times#:~:text=16%25%20of%20respondents%20say%20their,supermarket%20food%20packaging%20\(12%25\)](https://www.nlwa.gov.uk/news/102-million-disposable-facemasks-thrown-away-uk-each-week-would-cover-wembley-pitch-232-times#:~:text=16%25%20of%20respondents%20say%20their,supermarket%20food%20packaging%20(12%25)).
- 51 RECOUP (2020). The Impact of Covid-19 Across the Plastic Supply and Recycling Sectors. Available at: www.recoup.org/download/760/recoup-covid-19-impact-report.
- 52 Wired (2020). The coronavirus pandemic has totally derailed the war on plastic. Available at: www.wired.co.uk/article/coronavirus-plastic-pollution-environment.
- 53 ReLondon (2020). An assessment of the future impact of COVID-19 on commercial waste in London. Available at: <https://relondon.gov.uk/resources/report-adapting-commercial-waste-services-to-covid-19>.
- 54 London news online (2021). Covid-safe single-use plastics cause increase in pollution in the Thames. Available at: <https://londonnewsonline.co.uk/covid-safe-single-use-plastics-cause-increase-in-pollution-in-the-thames/>
- 55 Thames 21 (2020). Latest river Thames survey confirms COVID-19 plastic impact. Available at: www.thames21.org.uk/2020/12/latest-river-thames-survey-confirms-covid-19-plastic-impact/
- 56 Wired (2020). The coronavirus pandemic has totally derailed the war on plastic. Available at: www.wired.co.uk/article/coronavirus-plastic-pollution-environment.
- 57 Smithers, R (2020). Pandemic prompts doubling of online grocery shoppers in UK. Available at: www.theguardian.com/business/2020/aug/20/pandemic-prompts-doubling-of-online-grocery-shoppers-in-uk.
- 58 City Pantry (2020). COVID-19 and the hospitality industry. Available at: blog.citypantry.com/blog/.
- 59 NLWA (2020). 102 million disposable facemasks thrown away in UK. Available at: [https://www.nlwa.gov.uk/news/102-million-disposable-facemasks-thrown-away-uk-each-week-would-cover-wembley-pitch-232-times#:~:text=16%25%20of%20respondents%20say%20their,supermarket%20food%20packaging%20\(12%25\)](https://www.nlwa.gov.uk/news/102-million-disposable-facemasks-thrown-away-uk-each-week-would-cover-wembley-pitch-232-times#:~:text=16%25%20of%20respondents%20say%20their,supermarket%20food%20packaging%20(12%25)).
- 60 City to Sea (2020). Food-to-Go. Good to Go? Available at: www.citytosea.org.uk/campaign/food-to-go-report/.
- 61 HUBBUB (2020). What does a purpose driven business look like post COVID-19? Available at: www.hubbub.org.uk/blog/.
- 62 ReLondon personal communications with London SMEs (2020).
- 63 London COVID-19 Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC) (4 August 2020). STAC briefing note: Use of drinking fountains, Refill London and reusable cups. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/20200804_stac_briefing_water_fountains_refill_london_reusables_l.pdf
- 64 Available at: concordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4240/Water-Bottle-Bylaw-PDF.
- 65 Available at: www.portland.gov/code/17/103.
- 66 Available at: www.cityofberkeley.info/Public_Works/Zero_Waste/Berkeley_Single_Use_Foodware_and_Litter_Reduction_Ordinance.aspx#:~:text=Effective%20March%2027%2C%202019%2C%20the,harm%20to%20wildlife%2C%20greenhouse%20gas.
- 67 Zero Waste Europe (2018). The Story of ReCircle: Zero Waste Consumption and Production. Available at: zerowasteurope.eu/library/.
- 68 More information available at: https://plasticSMARTcities.org/products/plastic-manifesto?_pos=1&_sid=b601f8961&_ss=r.
- 69 The Independent (2021). Food delivery companies in France pledge to cut waste. Available at: www.independent.co.uk/news/food-delivery-companies-in-france-pledge-to-cut-waste-waste-france-paris-ap-waste-bl802491.html.
- 70 GLA (2020). London Recovery Program. Available at: www.london.gov.uk/.
- 71 An analysis of policy, material flows, infrastructure, sectoral reviews and future scenarios will be used to identify the future policy and interventions needed to deliver London's low carbon circular economy ambition. An updated Circular Economy Route Map for London will be published which set out a theory of change for how London can reach its low carbon circular city vision and key targets ,a number of future scenarios which provide evidence based options for longer term action and the recommended short and medium term actions needed to begin implementation of the theory of change. It is anticipated that the research phase will take approximately 18 months, and the new Route Map will be published in 2022/23.



relondon.gov.uk

69 Wilson Street, London, EC2A 2BB

ReLondon is the operating name of London Waste and Recycling Board