



Reducing single-use coffee cups at County Hall, Chelmsford

Why target single-use coffee cups?

Essex County Council, [Mitie](#) and [Gather & Gather](#), came together to reduce unnecessary single-use plastic waste at the County Hall offices in Chelmsford. We knew by making some simple changes, together we could really make a difference to the amount of single-use items being thrown away.

Before implementing any changes, a series of monthly waste audits were carried out. From this waste data, single-use coffee cups were prioritised as they were the single-use item most often thrown away, both in terms of number, but also weight.

The changes made

Gather & Gather already offered a discount for people using their own reusable coffee cups, but with only 12% of customers using the scheme, we knew we had to explore a new approach.

A range of ideas were explored including total bans, loyalty points, free reusable coffee cups or implementing a charge. The research around all of these options indicated the most effective ways to reduce single-use coffee cups was to either ban them or implement a charge. Behaviour change research suggests that a charge is roughly worth twice as much as an incentive, meaning a small charge is likely to be more effective than a discount of the same amount.

Following a communications campaign with staff, single-use cups were banned from the restaurant and replaced with ceramic cups for the self-serve coffee machine, as the majority of customers were drinking in this did not impact sales. In the grab and go café a 15p charge was added to single-use coffee cups. Alongside these changes, staff were also able to purchase subsidised reusable coffee cups.

The impact of the changes

The 15p charge and the total ban in the restaurant has significantly reduced the number of coffee cups thrown away by 50%. And, the number of people using a reusable coffee cup has risen from 12% to 57%.

In addition to the reduction of single-use coffee cups used, this change has generated a small income from the 15p charge. This income is used to offset other initiatives to reduce unnecessary plastic waste.

Advice or tips for others making the change

- Explore reusable options to avoid waste in the first instance, such as ceramic cups.
- Encourage reusable coffee cups, either by banning single-use coffee cups, adding a charge to the cost of a single-use cup or by offering an incentive.