



CASE STUDY

Reducing single-use plastic cutlery at County Hall, Chelmsford

Why target single-use plastic cutlery?

Essex County Council, [Mitie](#) and [Gather & Gather](#), came together to reduce unnecessary single-use plastic waste at the County Hall offices in Chelmsford. One of the items targeted was single-use plastic cutlery. Although plastic cutlery does not weigh much (approx. 2g per item), this was an easy win to reduce the amount used and thrown away.

There were two main sources of single-use cutlery in County Hall:

- Internal restaurant and café run by [Gather & Gather](#)
- Staff buying food off site and bringing back to the office

The changes made

Within the restaurant, metal cutlery had always been provided for customers wishing to eat in, however this option was also made more visible.

In addition to this in May 2019, Gather & Gather invested in more sustainable options, by making the swap from single-use plastic cutlery to wooden cutlery for customers with takeaway items.

These changes were supported across the building with communications about swapping single-use items for reusable items, and ideas such as keeping a set of reusable cutlery at work, aimed at staff grabbing lunch on-the-go and bringing back to the office.

Communications to staff on reducing single-use included:

- Article on the Intranet
- Posts on Yammer, the internal private social network for staff
- [YouTube video with staff sharing the switches they have made](#)
- Competition to encourage staff to share ideas, winners randomly selected to win reusable items

The impact of the changes

A 20% reduction of all single-use cutlery (both plastic and wooden) was seen as a result of these changes and communications, with more customers opting for reusable alternatives.

The analysis from monthly bin audits in County Hall from February to December 2019, not only showed the 20% reduction but plastic cutlery was also found to have significantly dropped by 64% on average over the same time period.

Advice or tips for others making the change

- Explore reusable options to avoid waste in the first instance, such as metal cutlery in canteens or staff using their own set of cutlery.
- Opt for more sustainable options where reusable options are not possible, such as wooden cutlery rather than plastic cutlery.