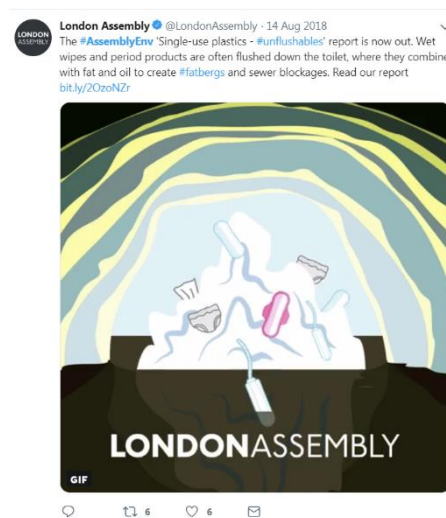


Single-use plastic: Unflushables

Published on 14 August 2018

Media coverage

- The report received good media coverage, with print, online, radio and television news items.
- The report was written about in articles by Huffpost, the Evening standard and the Guardian as well as in trade publications.
- The Chair was interviewed on BBC London news and on LBC



Impact and engagement

- The Chair and Deputy Chair hosted the Women's Environment Network Environmental event at City Hall on 19 October. The Chair was invited to speak about the report and the Deputy Chair hosted a panel discussion.
- Following the report, the Committee submitted a response to the Government consultation on banning single-use plastic straws, drinks stirrers and cotton buds. The Committee supported banning these products but called for the Government to go further, considering the Committee's recommendations in the *Unflushables* report and the bottled water report from 2017.
- Following the report, Water UK have announced a new standard for truly flushable wet wipes, which the committee called for in Recommendation 5.¹

Mayoral response

- The Mayor's response to the report was sent on 15 November 2018.
- The response was overall positive. The Mayor agreed with many of the concerns raised in the report and committed to undertake action on half of the recommendations. However, the Mayor suggested that some of the work would be more appropriately carried out by other organisations or bodies.
- In his response, the Mayor thanked Caroline Russell AM, and the Committee for their efforts compiling this report, and for the recommendations. He stated, "It effectively highlights, and makes some useful recommendations to address, the growing problem of sewer misuse and the environmental issues associated with plastic containing products commonly misperceived as flushable.."
- See below for a full breakdown of the recommendations and the Mayor's response.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-46835573>

Committee’s recommendation	RAG rating	Mayoral response
<p>Recommendation 1: The Mayor should work alongside Thames Water and local authorities to develop a ‘block buster borough scheme’. All boroughs, especially those with above average sewer blockages, should work with the Mayor to develop a programme of work to reduce these blockages.</p>		<p>The waste water network is owned and managed by Thames Water who currently run their own education activities, which aim to stop residents from putting the wrong items down their sinks and toilets causing blockages. The Greater London Authority (GLA) has supported Thames Water with previous campaigns and will continue to support any block buster schemes led by Thames Water.</p> <p>Thames Water’s Customer Challenge Group advises Thames Water and holds them to account. The Group’s focus includes problem plastics, microplastics and unflushables. The water industry recognises more research is needed to fully understand the impacts and help prioritise the interventions that will be most effective. Thames Water are involved in the work that UK Water Industry Research (UKWIR) is doing in areas such as developing a ‘flushability protocol’ and projects such as ‘sink to river, river to tap — a review of potential risks from nanoparticles and microplastics’. My officers have a seat on Thames Water’s Customer Challenge Group to represent London’s priorities and identify where I can support campaigns that act on the research findings. Through this group I will continue my focus on limiting the environmental impacts of plastic waste, as well as ensuring the water industry continues to press ahead with the microplastics research and impact mitigation work.</p> <p>I am also promoting the use of renewable fuels (e.g. biodiesel and hydro-treated vegetable oil) made from used cooking oils and fats (both unflushable waste products), for use in in GLA Group and borough fleets in the transition to low emission transport. This will help to divert this valuable resource from the waste water network and from causing fatbergs.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: During the next update of its guidance, the London Waste and Recycling Board (LWARB) should include the offer of a reusable nappy incentive as a tool for boroughs to increase their recycling rate. Boroughs should partner with midwives and health visitors to communicate to new parents and carers the availability of</p>		<p>LWARB’s Resource London programme already encourages boroughs to promote and introduce local reusable nappy schemes.</p> <p>With unflushable waste only making up around 5 -10 per cent of the household waste stream and limited opportunities for recycling, Resource London has focused its resources on supporting boroughs to reduce waste and boost recycling of the six main dry recycling materials and food waste. This is to meet my minimum level of household recycling service by 2020. The Government, in its recent Autumn Budget statement, made a commitment to help drive out single use plastics from the</p>

<p>reusable nappies and the need for responsible disposal of nappies and period products. LWARB and boroughs should also explore the possibility of incentivising reusable menstrual products as a complement to this scheme, for example by working with schools and health visitors.</p>		<p>supply chain. I support this commitment and consider that Public Health England is better placed to work with the Government on action to further promote reusable nappies.</p> <p>Resource London has prioritised its efforts into helping local authorities to reduce food waste and residual waste, and to drive up recycling rates. For example, Resource London provided support to the London Borough of Ealing to introduce controls on residual waste and a separate food waste service. This resulted in a fall in residual waste, a five per cent increase in recycling performance, and a £.7 million annual saving through service efficiencies and on waste disposal costs.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Under the accreditation review, the Mayor’s London Healthy Schools initiative should ask schools to demonstrate that they are period positive. This would mean using period positive language to reduce stigma about menstruation, informing children about binning not flushing, and promoting the range of reusable and disposable period products available. The Mayor should also lobby Ofsted and the Department for Education to ensure this is included in the curriculum and national standards and guidance.</p>		<p>My Healthy Schools London programme promotes a whole school approach to pupil health and wellbeing. Information about periods is delivered in schools via their Personal Social Health Education (PSHE) policies and curriculum. To achieve Healthy Schools London (HSL) Awards, schools must provide information about how PSHE is embedded across the whole school including having a Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) policy. New Department for Education (DfE) guidance for Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education will become mandatory in September 2020. Furthermore, for HSL, schools need to demonstrate how PSHE is included in the curriculum as well as citing schemes of work, resources and partners that are used in school. My HSL Team will be responding to the DfE consultation on the Guidance for RSE asking them to include a period positive message within the guidance. Information on the consultation can be found on the DfE website.</p> <p>More information about HSL and the criteria for achievement is available through the following link: www.healthyschools.london.gov.uk. Under the resources section, we have included a link to the work of Plan International UK who are promoting their ‘Menstrual Manifesto: how we change the conversation about periods in the UK’. The link to their work is here: https://plan-uk.org/act-for-girls/girls-rights-in-the-uk/break-the-barriers-our-menstrual-manifesto.</p>

<p>Recommendation 4: The Mayor should write to the Environment Secretary requesting a statutory format to display proper disposal information and the presence of plastic in unflushable products.</p>		<p>I support this recommendation and believe the appropriate route to do this is through my response to the current Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) consultation on banning certain single use plastics.</p> <p>I am supporting innovative products and services that reduce environmental impact through my Entrepreneur’s Programme. Recent winners include, in 2017, two London University students that created a product called Twipes. These are eco-friendly antibacterial wipes that can dissolve in water in 3 hours. In 2018 two students from another London University won the award having developed flushable sanitary products called Polypop.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: Along with water companies, Ofwat should be involved in developing an independent testing model and standard for flushable products. These companies should seek input from environmental experts to ensure that new products do not leave environmentally damaging residue. Water companies should liaise with designers, manufacturers and retailers on the merits of having the standard displayed prominently on their packaging.</p>		<p>I agree that water companies should have a role in the development, but should not necessarily be setting the standards for flushable products. There is likely to be a role here for UK Water Industry Research and Water UK in representing the water companies by working with designers and manufacturers of these products in a coordinated way. The water industry currently has its own Water Industry Standard for flushability, but it differs from standards used in the manufacturing industry. This points to the need for an independent standard setter to develop a single standard which drives the manufacture of genuinely flushable products that cause no harm to the environment. I would however, question the suggestion that the economic regulator of the water sector (Ofwat) is the correct body to oversee the production of a standard. I would suggest this is a role for Defra in policy terms and potentially the Environment Agency, in operational and regulatory terms. There is possibly a role for the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in developing an industry standard.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: The Mayor should write to the Environment Secretary supporting a ban for unflushable wet wipes that contain plastic and advising that only products that have passed a robust flushability standard are allowed on the market.</p>		<p>As for recommendation 4, I support this recommendation. I believe the best route to do this is through my consultation response to Defra recommending the scope of banned items should include unflushable products that contain plastic.</p> <p>As also referenced in recommendation 4, I am supporting innovative products and services that reduce environmental impact through my Entrepreneur’s Programme</p>

<p>Recommendation 7: LWARB should investigate recycling for unflushable waste in London.</p>		<p>This is a national issue and one best placed for Government to investigate and address. In my London Environment Strategy, I called on the Government to set minimum design standards for reuse and recyclability, and to strengthen Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) requirements to help design out hard-to-recycle materials and put more of the disposal costs on product manufacturers. In developing my response to the Government’s expected consultation on EPR I will reiterate the need to investigate recycling opportunities for unflushable waste where it exists. My officers have worked with LWARB and suppliers to look at this in the past, including an assessment of two nappy recycling projects submitted to LWARB’s open calls for expressions. In both cases a viable model was not found for such a product at scale. This could change with the Government’s proposals to strengthen Extended Producer Responsibility requirements on materials used to make nappies and other sanitary products.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8: The GLA Group should provide bins in its men’s toilets for unflushable single-use products and encourage other public and private sector organisations to adopt this approach.</p>		<p>I recognise that unflushable waste arises from men’s toilets as well as women’s and am committed to reduce this waste stream. In my London Environment Strategy, I committed the GLA group to lead by example in its own operations. This includes, for example, cutting unnecessary use of single use plastic bottles and other disposables across our estate. Functional Bodies are developing implementation plans demonstrating how they will achieve this ambition and I will ensure specific action is taken which is directed towards reducing unflushable waste. I will also ensure that my officers raise the issue of bins in men’s toilets for unflushables. Discussions on this have already commenced and I expect to be able to instigate suitable measures in the near future.</p>
<p>General Comments:</p>		<p>In the longer term, solutions such as the Tideway Tunnel will help limit unwanted sewage pollutants from reaching the River Thames. Actions set out in my London Environment Strategy to reduce sewage pollution reaching London’s rivers will also contribute to tackling the problem.</p> <p>My officers are also engaging with Thames Water on their emerging London 2100 project — a longer-term adaptive plan for securing London’s future drainage and wastewater provision.</p>