



Greening your workplace: a guide to help small businesses tackle their single-use plastic footprint



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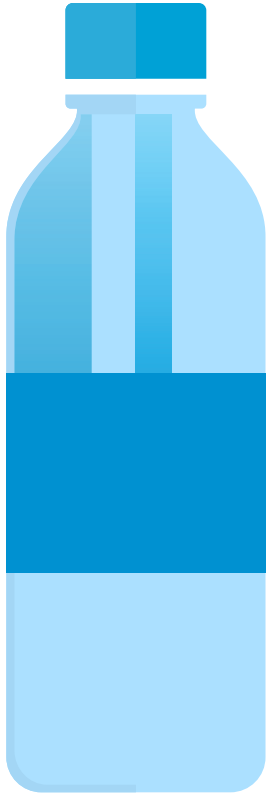




Chapter one: Introduction



Introduction



Plastic is durable, hygienic and cost effective - vital for many products we rely on. But these characteristics have also helped create a throwaway culture; from on-the-go coffee cups to 'disposable' bottles.

The Government is currently taking steps to discourage the use of single-use plastic. However, sustainability is complex.

- Simply switching from single-use plastic to another disposable item made from a material such as paper or glass is not always the most environmentally-friendly action. It can have unintended consequences such as increased carbon emissions or food waste.
- For small businesses with limited resources and other competing demands, the challenge of reducing single-use plastics can seem overwhelming.

This toolkit will help guide your business to make positive changes.

- We recognise that the way businesses operate has changed due to the coronavirus pandemic, with many offices operating remotely. There is increasing likelihood that a hybrid working system becomes the 'new normal' and we have designed the toolkit in such a way that accounts for this.
- This toolkit has been developed to help small businesses reduce their reliance on single-use plastics, however, the approach can be used across a range of resources.



Defining single-use plastic

There is no standardised definition of single-use plastic. For the purposes of this toolkit and for those carrying out an audit, we suggest using the following parameters as set out by the UK Government:

“...‘single-use plastics’ includes all products that are made wholly or partly of plastic and are typically designed to be used just once and/or used briefly before being disposed of. This includes much plastic packaging as well as a variety of other items. While the Government recognises the environmental benefits of diverting waste from landfill to energy recovery or recycling, the waste hierarchy suggests that extended or repeated use is distinct and preferable, where possible.” – HMT, August 2018



The business case



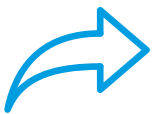
Employees

Employees are looking to employers to lead the way
- Gen Z and millennials highly value the sustainability credentials of their employer.



Customers

Eight in 10 consumers are actively trying to reduce their plastic waste and many are willing to pay higher prices as a result.



Supply Chains

Your company's sustainability policies may start to impact your relationships with those you supply.



Sector

It may be detrimental to fall behind and come across as a laggard.



Regulation

Many companies are choosing to plan for and get ahead of coming policy changes.



Reputation

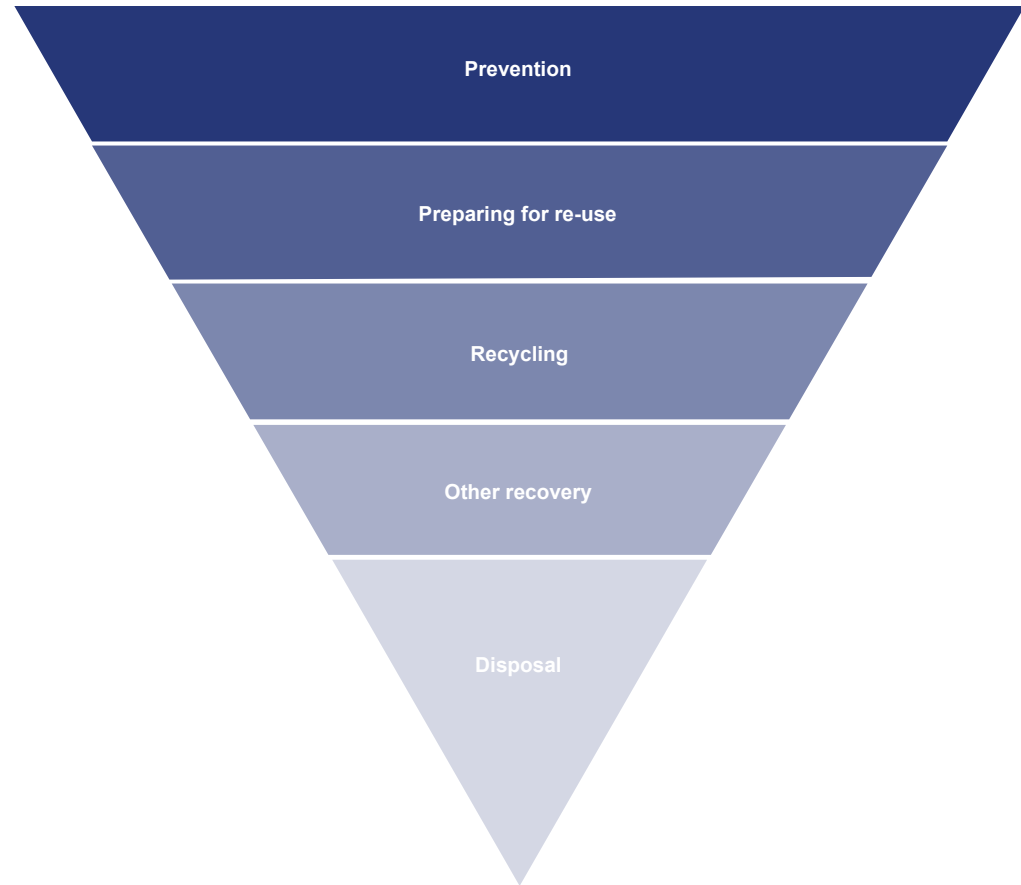
While this shouldn't be the only factor driving sustainability decisions, it's a key consideration in competitive markets.



The waste hierarchy

The waste hierarchy sets out the five steps for dealing with waste in order of environmental impact. It forms the basis of EU and UK sustainability policies and was incorporated into UK law in 2011.

The hierarchy shows that your first priority is to reduce the single-use plastic used in your business. Shifting our mindset towards re-use is therefore key to tackling the problem of plastic waste.





Chapter two: Laying the foundations



Steering committee

In order to embrace sustainable practices, you will need everyone across the business on board. However, a small team should oversee each stage of the process and agree next steps. Ideally, this will include representatives from across the business, including:



**Finance/
accounting**



**Office
management**



**Catering
(if applicable)**



**Senior
leadership**



**Communications
and marketing**

This team should meet initially to discuss the approach and agree timescales.

You may wish to set up regular catch ups or create a group email address.

The steering committee will not necessarily be the one approving changes but can act as the driving force.

Audit

It's important to be clear about what you want to focus on and where you are aiming to achieve change. Areas to consider could include:

- **Waste management and recycling**
- **Office catering**
- **Food and drink brought into the office**
- **Hydration solutions**
- **Stationery / materials**
- **Client hospitality**
- **Packaging (incoming and outgoing from the office)**
- **Supply chain**



Audit

To ensure the audit works and any recommendations are achievable, pick up to four areas as initial priorities. To determine these, consider the following:

- **Nature of office** – do you have control over the building or is it a serviced block? If the latter, you will have to build discussion with other tenants and the office management into your planning discussion.
- **Nature of business** – does your work involve significant use of packaging, or is client hospitality a big focus? Do you have significant visitor footfall? Focus on areas where change will be most meaningful.
- **Autonomy** – how much are you able to change processes in your office? Focus on areas in which you can affect change, such as materials brought into the office by employees.
- **Appetite for change** – are you in a position to transform your office, or are you likely to meet obstacles related to cost / resources? Focus on areas where the inputs required to achieve change are deliverable.
- **Staff structures** – is your team full-time, or do you work with contractors or temporary staff? Have you introduced a hybrid working system? It may make more sense to focus on interventions related to the office itself, rather than employees.



Engaging colleagues

1

Staff survey

Before you begin the audit, it is important you understand what your staff think.

The easiest way to do this is via a simple survey which could also be shared with contractors or clients.

The results will also be key for setting targets and metrics which can be referred to again later in the process to evaluate progress and success.

A template survey is available on the following page.

2

Interpreting the results

The next step is to interpret the findings, as follows:

- Collate all the results in one excel spreadsheet.
- For the quantitative questions, draw out averages.
- For the qualitative questions, identify commonalities and themes to reduce the number of answers.

3

Drawing conclusions

Refer to your findings and ask:

- Is there appetite for change? Which employees are most enthusiastic?
- Which areas do staff see as priorities? Where does it make sense to concentrate your immediate efforts?
- Where is change most feasible, given the nature of the business?
- Are there any challenges you have identified?
- Did staff make any practical suggestions - either 'easy wins' or longer-term projects?
- Did staff identify any external initiatives to learn from?

Digest these findings and present them to the steering committee to agree next steps.



Chapter three: Beginning the process



Beginning the process



You should now have a clear picture of how to proceed.

Depending on how ambitious you want to be, you may wish to take forward multiple workstreams.

To engage all staff in the process, you should now communicate some of your findings internally, including what you now plan to concentrate on.

You should commit to a clear timescale for a progress update and give staff a point of contact for any feedback or constructive ideas they might have.

Making a change

Alongside the work to review your supply chain, immediate internal changes can be made without significant cost or time pressure.

These 'quick wins' and 'short-term asks' are not designed to replace the supplier workstream, but to ensure changes can be put in place quickly and that the process does not get delayed by external factors.

Quick wins in the office



Reduce

Identify where you can remove non-essential plastic and set reduction targets.

- Walk around the office. Are there plastic folders in your stationery cupboard?
- How could you reduce non-essential plastic without impacting on employees' day to day life?



Reuse

Look at where single-use plastic is being used unnecessarily - could you change that by equipping people with longer lasting alternatives?

- For example, are people using plastic spoons, because cutlery in the kitchen runs out?



Recycle

Place recycling bins in accessible locations.

- Speak to your office manager, local council or waste contractor to find out what materials you can recycle in your office.
- Put up signs to ensure employees know what should go in the recycling bin.



Review

Encourage staff to share their thoughts.

- Set up a feedback loop for staff either via steering committee meetings or an anonymous suggestions box.

Short term asks in the office



Week one

- Please use reusable coffee cups and water bottles instead of on-the-go and single-use options.
- Say no to plastic cutlery and plastic bags.



Month one

- Try to bring your lunch in with you, or bring reusable containers for on-the-go retailers to put your lunch into.
- Only buy reusable pens and notebooks without plastic ring binders.
- Research sustainable food and drink catering options.
- Remember to switch off appliances, digital equipment and lights when they're not in use.



First 100 days

- Recycle in line with guidance posters – do not put any food substances in the recycling bin as this will contaminate the whole bag. Rinse out any tins or plastic bottles and pots.
- Keep sharing your ideas and feedback on our new initiatives.

Quick wins at home



Reduce

Identify where you can remove non-essential plastic.

- Help employees to complete a household audit to better understand their plastic use.
- Show employees areas they can cut down by pointing them to online resources and providing top tips i.e., buy loose fruit and veg and avoid unnecessary plastic packaging.



Reuse

Look at where single-use plastic is being used unnecessarily.

- Encourage employees to make simple switches, for example a filter jug rather than bottled water, reusable shopping bags rather than plastic bags, and Tupperware rather than clingfilm to store leftovers.



Recycle

Help employees understand recycling best practice.

- Direct employees to their local council website to learn what plastics can and can't be recycled in their area.
- Help employees discover where they can recycle 'hard to recycle' plastics like crisp packets and salad bags via supermarket collection schemes.



Review

Encourage staff to share their thoughts.

- Provide staff with opportunities to share their successes at home.
- Incentivise sustainable practices by creating friendly competitions i.e., Who can reduce their single-use plastic use at home the most? Who can get their kids or pets involved?

Short term asks at home



Week one

- Encourage the use reusable water bottles and glassware instead of single-use options.
- Encourage the use of Tupperware rather than cling film to protect food.
- Encourage the use of reusable shopping bags rather than plastic bags.



Month one

- Support employees to seek out information on what can be recycled in their local area and how.
- Raise awareness of the importance of more sustainable behaviours and how easy these can be to integrate into daily life while working remotely.



First 100 days

- Employees are more regularly recycling in line with local council guidance.
- Employees are also sharing ideas and examples of success with colleagues.



Bright ideas



Supporting staff in the office:

- If you supply tea bags for staff, make sure they are plastic-free or look into offering loose leaf tea.
- Buy branded reusable coffee cups and water bottles to encourage staff not to use single-use versions.
- Set up a coffee cup recycling scheme in your office. If you have a coffee machine that uses pods make sure you recycle them too.
- Look into installing a water filter to discourage staff from buying bottled water.
- If you use plastic binders or badge holders for presentations and events be sure to reuse them.
- Whenever you order in external catering, use companies that avoid plastic in the packaging and cutlery.

Supporting remote staff:

- Provide guidance on the biggest sources of plastic waste in the home.
- Provide reusable water bottles and encourage their use to support remote working.
- Supply notebooks without plastic ring binders.
- Encourage the use of cleaning products that can be refilled rather than thrown away.





Chapter four: Long-term change



PLASTIC FREE



COMPOSTABLE



RECYCLED



BIO

DEGRADABLE

Supply chain mapping

The next step is to map what is within your control to change.

You can do this by building a picture of your supply chain.

Start by reviewing your suppliers and building a database to map out who they are, what they do for you and who the key contacts are.

Some services may be provided by your local authority or you may need to consult your landlord or building manager. Once you have reviewed all your suppliers, start by auditing a couple of those operating in your chosen priority areas for tackling single-use plastic.

You need to specifically ascertain:

- What, if any, single-use plastic products or materials they provide?
- Do they offer alternatives, or would you need to swap suppliers? What are the alternatives?
- Are they more expensive, or do they have any specific downsides?
- Who in the business would you need approval from in order to switch?
- What contract do you have? Do you have a notice period?
- How significant a reduction in single-use plastic would be achieved if you switched supplier?
- How much in-organisation support is there for you to switch supplier for this?

Answering these questions will enable you to make an informed decision about whether this is something to focus on now, or in the future. Every situation will be different. It may be that you can take action in one or two areas immediately, or that it is simpler than your originally thought to switch your suppliers.



Identifying sustainable suppliers

Collaborative engagement with suppliers will help to reduce supply chain risks and enable joint development of products and supply chains with reduced impacts. You can even save money by generating more efficiency.

When choosing suppliers, you need a fully informed, data driven and holistic process - otherwise there may be unintended consequences. Although on the surface it appears you have found a more sustainable product, for example, by switching to paper over plastic, there may be negative impacts such as increased deforestation.

To confidently identify the most sustainable suppliers, first, clearly define your expectations. It is worth looking at whether there are any sectoral initiatives that could support you in conducting assessments so that you can rely on tried and tested data.



Identifying sustainable suppliers

Broadly, you should look to answer the following questions:

- Does the supplier use a certified environmental management system to assess and monitor their environmental impacts?
- Are they compliant with environmental legislation? Have they ever been prosecuted for failing to comply?
- Look at the packaging and materials they use.
- Consider the full life cycle and supply chain for products – e.g., what resource is used to create a product, whether waste is created during its manufacture, whether it uses hazardous substances, how much packaging it uses and so on.
- Ask for their sustainability reports, policies and targets.
- Which countries are involved in the supply chain and what do you know about them? Are there any geopolitical risks?
- Look at the internal practices the supplier encourages.
- Do they have holistic policies that cover a broad range of sustainability criteria such as reducing plastic and carbon emissions, driving diversity and inclusion and eliminating modern slavery?
- Do they have any ratings, awards or associations?
- Do they have a clear narrative for sustainability and act as a responsible, purposeful organisation?
- Who is responsible for sustainability within their organisation?

Switching suppliers

Information to share

If you are meeting resistance or switching will be a complex process, work with suppliers to encourage them to provide alternatives or help you make changes.

You could approach them with the following:

- A clear issue you are facing.
- Why you want to change – environmental reasons / staff survey findings.
- Examples of what sector rivals are doing.
- Questions about their plans to offer alternatives.
- Offering to help them pilot new products or processes.

Method of engagement

Begin from a collaborative standpoint - you want to work together to find a solution. Positive engagement is best managed via open communication.

Use some of the following top tips:

- Highlight the value of this work as marketing for their future clients - how it could help them to win business.
- Stress the business continuity and resilience benefits of supply security.
- Explore whether there are any supplier recognition or award schemes the company could enter.
- Be supportive and encouraging - you want to build a solution together.

Alternative approach

If this less direct approach doesn't work there are two other key tactics that may encourage change:

- Introducing competition among suppliers, comparing them and monitoring their progress and performance.
- Enforcing a change by setting minimum requirements to be met within their contract.

Roadmap to change

Q1

- Build and share the business case to get internal buy-in.
- Set a sustainability strategy and targets, ensuring you have a clear policy in place that is communicated to all employees.
- Ensure sustainability is ingrained within procurement and financial processes.

Q2

- Speak to your current suppliers to understand their plans and the challenges they face.
- Ask them for their sustainability criteria including packaging specifications.
- Work with your existing suppliers to align targets.
- Begin to look for alternative suppliers as needed.

Q3

- Review progress against your targets and strategy.
- Make adjustments where necessary.
- Ask for feedback from suppliers and staff.

Q4

- Share your successes and plans for the future.
- Implement ongoing monitoring processes and expectation management.



Chapter five: Measurement



Target setting

The key to target setting as a way to measure progress and mark your achievements is making sure your ambitions are SMART.



- This means they are **Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Relevant** and **Time-based**.
- In order to gain momentum, it is also important to use a mixture of short-term and long-term targets so colleagues and partners are kept motivated and can see the improvements they are making along the way.
- Don't forget to celebrate your wins and recognise those who played a part in making them possible.

Setting SMART targets

Record your baseline

As part of your plastics audit you should have identified where you are using plastic.

To measure progress you now need to understand how much you are currently using.

Make it measurable

How will you be able to measure progress, what tools or partners can you work with? E.g., can your waste management contractors tell you how much of your waste is recycled vs. sent to landfill?

Create a timeline and a process for measurement so that you are reporting and reviewing progress regularly in alignment with your targets.

Identify an ambitious long-term goal

Think about where you would like to be in 10, 20, 30 years' time and set a target.

Make sure this is ambitious and be clear who is responsible, and how you will measure it.

For inspiration, look at your competitors, customers, or similar sized businesses in other sectors to identify where you should be setting your sights. If you can, try to align your goals with wider campaigns such as WRAP's UK Plastics Pact.

Put stepping stones in place

Now you need to identify the shorter-term, perhaps annual targets that will get you to your overall goal.

Again, make sure these are assigned to people, be clear how they can be measured and be specific.

Communicate, communicate, communicate

Now you have set your targets make sure you tell your employees, suppliers and partners about them, why you have set them, how you will measure them and who is responsible.

Report on your progress regularly, either just to internal audiences or to external stakeholders as well. Ask for feedback and make yourselves accountable.

Communicating success

There are a number of ways to communicate your progress and achievements. This might include new commitments, reaching a target or even just praising your staff for making good progress in tackling plastic waste at home.

Possible communications tactics include:



Social media content

Share news on your social media channels including using images and GIFs.



LinkedIn posts and articles

Share longer pieces on new programmes and progress updates.



Press releases and opinion pieces in the media

There may be opportunities to secure media coverage if your achievements are particularly impactful or interesting to the public.



Collaborate with other stakeholders in your sector

Working with partners including sustainability organisations helps raise the profile of your company and achievements amongst a broader network.



Internal newsletter and communications

There is a clear opportunity to provide regular updates on your ongoing sustainability activities and staff accomplishments.

Transparency

In order to avoid greenwashing, be honest with yourself and your stakeholders about your progress. If you have missed any targets take the time to understand why and put the measures in place to change this.

There is no set way to report on your targets, but options to do this include:



A quarterly company update, either on email or at a set recurring meeting in the diary.



An annual Environmental Impact Report.



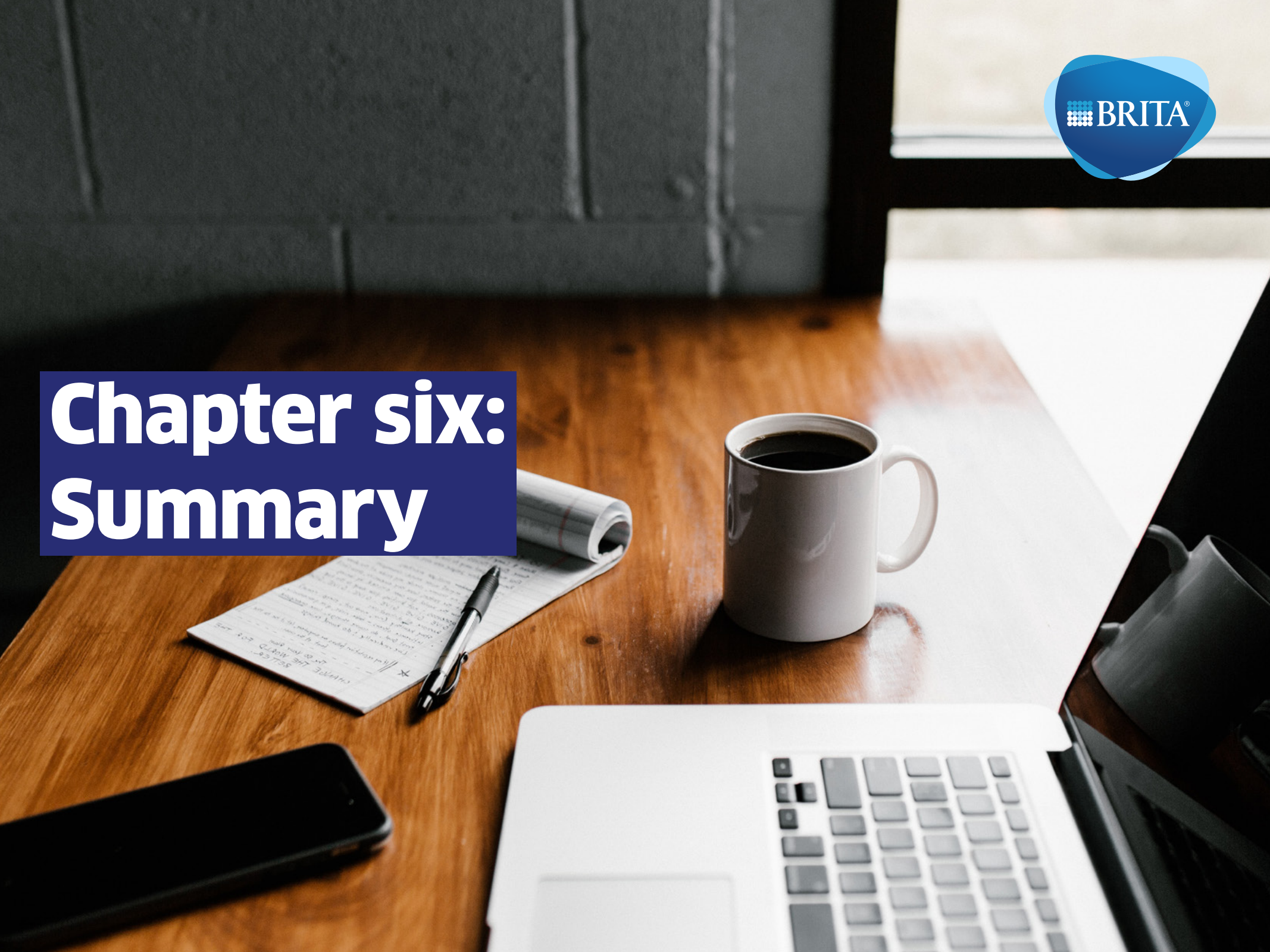
Facts and figures published as regular updates on LinkedIn or the company blog.



A standing page on your website with your policies, targets and plans which you update regularly.



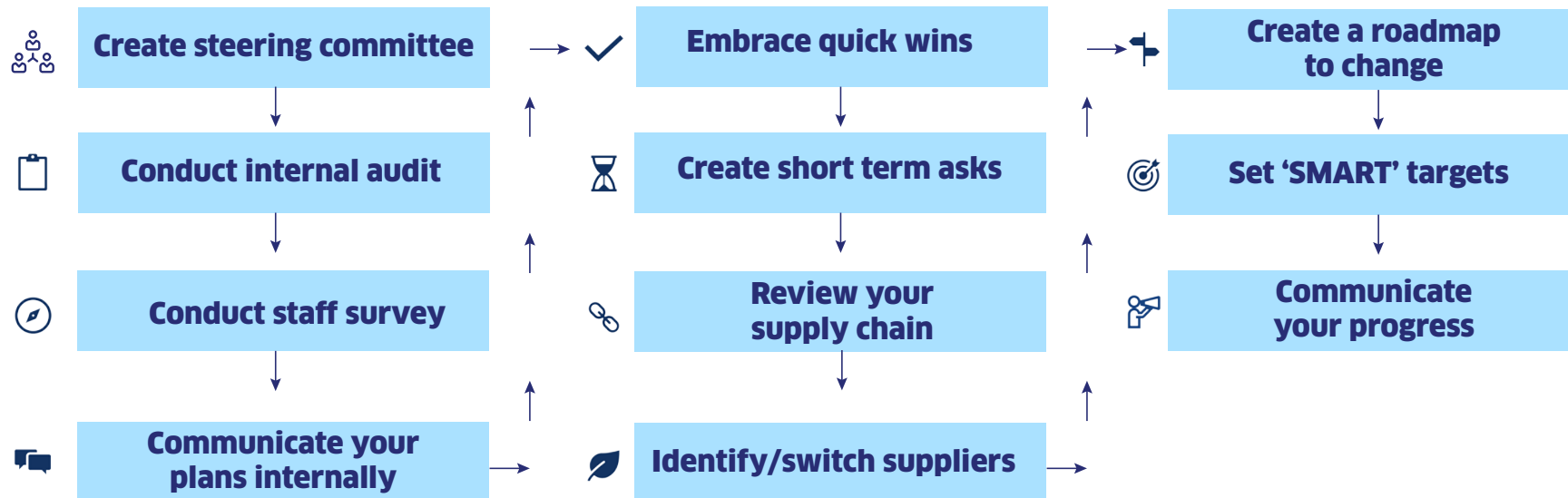
Chapter six: Summary



Plan on a page

There is no right or wrong way to review, assess and embrace sustainability practices in your business. Depending on how ambitious you want to be, you could have a number of processes taking place simultaneously.

Here is a brief summary or 'Plan on a Page' to help you get started and chart your progress:





**Thank you for downloading our guide to greening your workplace.
For more information or to let us know how you get on with
reducing your single-use plastic footprint please get in touch via:
BRITA@lexcomm.co.uk**