

Local Government Association briefing, Westminster Hall debate, litter and fly-tipping in England Thursday 25 February 2016



Briefing

KEY MESSAGES

- Tackling waste crime is a key priority for local authorities. Successful local approaches ensure 73 per cent of residents are very or fairly satisfied with the street cleaning service their council provides¹.
- Councils spend around £1 billion per year dealing with littering and fly-tipping, and cleaning up chewing gum alone costs the average town centre £60,000 per year (up to £56 million for 936 towns in England).
- Fly-tipping statistics for England (2014/15) published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in 2015 states the estimated cost of clearance of fly-tipping to local authorities in England in 2014/15 was nearly £50million, an 11 per cent increase on 2013/14².
- Local authorities dealt with a total of 900 thousand incidents of fly tipping in 2014/15, an increase of 5.6 per cent since 2013/14, with nearly two thirds of fly-tips involving household waste³.
- The LGA is calling for more powers that would ensure: local government continues to tackle effectively littering and fly-tipping; producers take more responsibility for the costs of littering; and councils are able to tackle and deter people from fly tipping through fixed penalty notices.
- In September 2015 LGA Environment spokesman Cllr Peter Box said: "At a time when councils face difficult choices about services in the light of reducing budgets, they are having to spend almost a £1 billion each year on tackling litter and fly-tipping. This is money that would be better spent on vital front line services. Litter and fly-tipping is environmental vandalism – it's unpleasant, unnecessary and unacceptable.

"We need a new streamlined system which helps councils - one that is nimble, flexible and effective. Not only does fly-tipping create an eyesore for residents, it is also a serious public health risk, creating pollution and attracting rats and other vermin."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On waste crime, the role of local authorities is predominantly concerned with the cleanliness of public spaces and the impact of littering and fly-tipping and councils are successful in tackling the problem of littering and fly-tipping. Local authorities combine the use of local campaigns to educate the public about littering and enforcement action to tackle the problem. This is demonstrated by high resident satisfaction levels and broad reductions in incidents of fly-tipping over recent years.

¹ Polling on resident satisfaction with councils, LGA, April 2014, p13

<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11981/Residents%27%20satisfaction+with+councils+April+2014/b38a0999-2e91-4cbd-8842-393e6229c731>

² Fly-tipping statistics for England 2014/15, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, October 2015, p1
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/469566/Flycapture_201415_Statistical_release_FINAL.pdf

³ibid

However dealing with the issues is expensive and local authority budgets on these areas are increasingly threatened by funding reductions from central government. As a result councils are seeking ever more efficient means of tackling littering and fly-tipping. This is happening through a range of different and complementary approaches combining local campaigns to reinforce positive behaviours and foster increased civic pride with the use of enforcement action.

Fly-tipping

Fly-tipping is reported nationally and incidents decreased between 2007/08, when 1,284 thousand were recorded, and 2012/13, when 711 thousand incidents were recorded⁴. However, fly-tipping incidents increased to 852 thousand in 2013/14 and by 5.6 per cent to 2014/15 to 900 thousand⁵. The estimated cost of clearance to local authorities in England in 2014/15 was nearly £50 million⁶. In seeking to tackle fly-tipping local authorities spent an estimated £17.6 million on enforcement action in England in 2014/15 and £17.3 million in 2013/14⁷.

Enforcement powers include the ability to issue fixed penalties for littering, of which more than 30,000 were issued by councils in 2009 (the last year of national records)⁸. Fly-tipping incidents can only be dealt with through prosecution, which is time consuming, expensive for local authorities and often only results in limited fines. Councils carried out 2,000 prosecutions in 2013/14, 98 per cent, of which were successful.

- Buckinghamshire Waste Partnership report that they have only received 59 per cent (£35,000 short) of the costs of successful fly-tipping prosecutions they have brought since 2004.

We would like to see the Government introduce a fixed penalty for fly-tipping to give councils a more effective deterrent against offenders and swifter means of enforcing against fly-tipping. If focused on small scale fly-tipping (for example, larger incidents than can be considered as littering, but smaller quantities than the dumping of a van load of material) it would also allow councils to continue to bring prosecutions for the larger incidents that require a higher level of ultimate penalty. The fine for small scale fly-tipping should be proportionate but sufficient to provide a firm deterrent.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs consulted on waste crime in 2015 and we welcomed the inclusion of a section on fixed penalties for fly-tipping in the Call for Evidence. We now look forward to further announcements by Government on this area.

Littering from vehicles

Research shows that roads and verges are some of the most littered parts of the country and 23 per cent of motorists have admitted dropping litter out of their car windows. As well as having a significant negative effect on how places are perceived by the public, road litter can be dangerous to those in open-topped vehicles and those on motorbikes and bicycles.

Existing powers are ineffective to deal with littering from vehicles because of the difficulty of positively identifying the person that dropped the litter. This was recognised by the Government, which has legislated to allow for fines to be issued to the vehicle owner as part of the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, which is a positive step. However, regulations must be laid for the powers to come into force. Given that these powers have been in place for London Boroughs for some time the Government should set a timetable for laying the regulations to enable councils outside London to make use of the powers.

⁴ Fly-tipping statistics for England 2014/15, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, October 2015, p3

⁵This may reflect both improvements to the capture of fly-tipping incidents as well as genuine increases in the number of incidents

⁶ Fly-tipping statistics for England 2014/15, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, October 2015, p3

⁷ Fly-tipping statistics for England 2014/15, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, October 2015, p7

⁸ Source: Defra <http://data.gov.uk/dataset/fixed-penalty-notice-litter>

Producer pays model

- Cleaning up **chewing gum** alone costs the average town centre £60,000 per year, which adds up to £56 million for the 936 towns in England. There is an opportunity for the chewing gum industry to provide a greater level of contribution to local authority litter reduction awareness campaigns as well as the actual cost of clearance. The Chewing Gum Action Group would be a useful place to commence discussions on how an increased contribution could be made.
- **Mattresses** are one of the most commonly fly-tipped products, and are costly to collect and difficult and expensive to recycle. Producers should be encouraged to contribute towards collection costs or offer take-back services when delivering a new product, which some mattress suppliers already do.

Case studies

- Manchester City Council has run a campaign with posters reinforcing responsibility for littering that asks and answers the question: 'Who is responsible for how clean the city is? You Are'.
- Sutton Council's anti-litter campaign started with an eleven tonne mountain of rubbish created in the middle of Sutton High Street to show how much street litter was being collected each day and the £4 million cost per year.
- Swindon Borough Council set up the Swindon Community Waste Partnership to carry out engagement with the community to help reduce fly-tipping; encourage residents to report incidents and clearance of litter and fly-tipped material.

Appendix

Council campaigns on littering and fly-tipping reduction

A range of campaigns councils have undertaken to reduce littering and fly-tipping is set out below:

Positive reinforcement:

- Fenland District Council's 'Tidy Fenland' anti-litter campaign is focused on behaviour change through posters that highlight that eight out of ten people never drop litter. It has combined this with a voluntary code of practice for businesses to support the campaign, provide bins and ensure their premises are kept clear of litter. The campaign has led to a 58 per cent reduction in littering.
- East Lindsay District Council ran a 'Responsible People' anti-littering campaign to highlight responsible behaviour.
- Leeds City Council's litter and dog fouling campaign includes a reward scheme for people seen by enforcement officers using litter bins.
- Manchester City Council ran a campaign with posters reinforcing responsibility for littering that asks and answers the question: 'Who is responsible for how clean the city is? You Are'.
- Mid Suffolk hold Democracy Days that give teenagers an overview of the public realm/street cleaning service the Council offers. It provides an understanding of what council tax pays for in relation to this service and what the operatives job entails in the community.

Town centre awareness raising day:

- North Hertfordshire District Council held an event to raise awareness about discarded cigarette ends and chewing gum in Letchworth Town Centre.

- Sutton Council's anti-litter campaign started with an eleven tonne mountain of rubbish was created in the middle of Sutton High Street to show how much street litter was being collected each day and the £4 million cost per year.

Campaigns with schools:

- Maidstone Borough Council ran a 'Love where you Learn' campaign to encourage schools to develop anti-littering initiatives by offering grants funded through fines that are issued to people who drop litter in the town centre.

Enforcement campaigns:

- The 'Don't mess with Waltham Forest' campaign outlines the expectations of residents and local businesses on a range of enviro-crime issues and highlights the penalties.
- The 'Report the tosser' campaign is run by Braintree District Council to reduce littering from vehicles and has led to a 55 per cent reduction in littering from vehicles.

Litter picking days:

- South Norfolk Council ran the Big Litter Pick 2014, which included 52 community groups and 720 volunteers who collected 543 bags of rubbish and recycling.

Fly-tipping reduction campaigns:

- Boston Borough Council set up the Operation Fly Swat project to tackle fly-tipping and help rehabilitate offenders with a range of partners including the local prison. The project involved placement of offenders in the Council's Fly Swat team to help provide vocational experience and increase the Council's ability to detect and clear up fly-tipping incidents.
- Suffolk County Council set up the 'Tip-Off: Stop Fly-tipping in Suffolk' to raise awareness and encourage reporting of incidents by householders, landowners and businesses.
- Swindon Borough Council set up the Swindon Community Waste Partnership to carry out engagement with the community to help reduce fly-tipping, encourage residents to report incidents and clearance of litter and fly-tipped material.