

Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report 2023/24

KEEP
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IRELAND
BEAUTIFUL



**CLEANER
NEIGHBOURHOODS**





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What is the Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report?

The Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report provides a detailed yearly analysis of Northern Ireland's local environmental quality.

The report sets out to give clear, unbiased information about anti-social behaviours, such as littering, dog fouling and graffiti. In total, the report is based on surveying Northern Ireland's cleanliness levels in the following areas:

- **Litter** – any refuse, filth, garbage or any other nauseous, offensive or unsightly waste. This includes items such as cigarettes, chocolate wrappers, crisp bags, bottles and cans.
- **Detritus** – comprising small, broken down particles of synthetic and natural materials. This includes dust, mud, soil, rotted leaf, vegetation residues, and fragments of twigs, glass, plastic and other finely divided materials.
- **Grffiti** – writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface, visible from a public place. Murals and cultural artworks are not considered graffiti.

- **Flyposting** – the placing of unauthorised advertising or posters in a public place. This also includes stickers, bills and large posters.
- **Staining** – all substances that mark a pavement, this commonly includes chewing gum, oil, drinks stains and heavy discolouration.

All sites, or transects, are assessed to establish the extent to which they are degraded by the presence of each of the pollutants noted above. The transect is then given a pass or fail award and allocated a respective cleanliness score, both of which contribute to creating the overall picture of Northern Ireland's environmental health and performance.

To generate the most accurate and insightful analysis of pollution in Northern Ireland's different landscapes and communities, the Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report collects local environmental quality data from a diverse and standardised range of transects that extend to all parts of the country. The full set of land-use types surveyed are:

- Primary Retail
- Secondary Retail
- Rural Area
- Main Road
- High Obstruction Residential

- Low Obstruction Residential
- Recreational
- Industry/Retail Sheds

Finally, as well as providing a summary of the NI Litter Survey, which looks at pollution indicators around the country, the report includes where available, details on enforcement actions taken by councils, including the number of fixed penalties issued for littering and dog fouling, and the associated estimated cleansing spend costs for taxpayers.

Methodology

The 2023 Northern Ireland litter surveys were carried out between the months of July and September. The Litter Pollution Index is the percentage of transects that failed to reach an acceptable standard of cleanliness. The LEAMS approach of measuring litter assigns scores based on an assessment of litter presence, type and source. LEAMS scores record standards of cleanliness (Grades A to D). This year's report is based on 1,100 surveys conducted across Northern Ireland (100 surveys per council area).



Summary

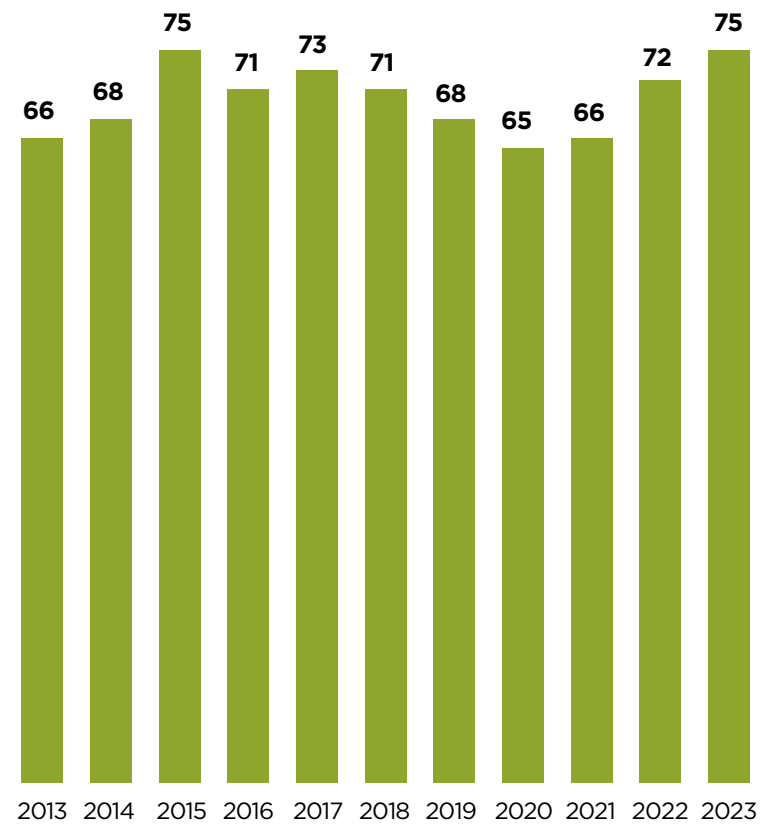
The Big Picture

Findings and insights

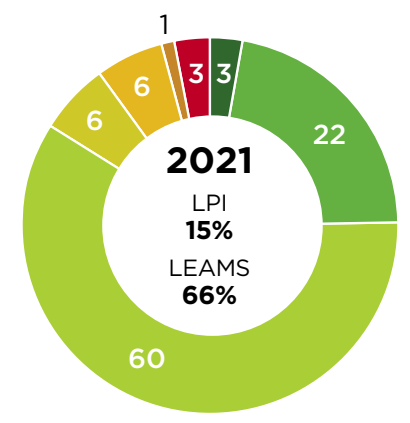
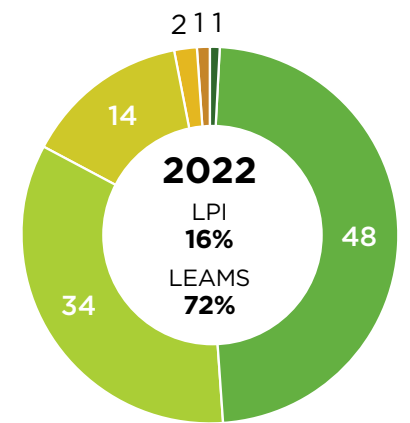
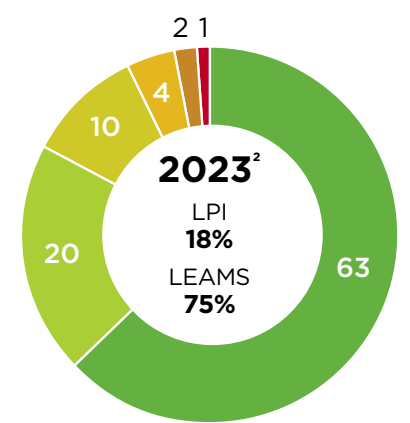
- **18% of transects¹** surveyed in 2023 failed to reach the acceptable standard for cleanliness (Grade A to B). This is a 2% deterioration on the 2021/22 results.
- **The LEAMS score**, which reflects the average score out of 100 of all transects surveyed, increased to 75% and builds on last year's improvement in cleanliness by another 3%.
- **Dog fouling** saw an upward spike again in 2023, after reducing to 2% in 2022 from 13% in 2020, the percentage of transects with dog fouling increased to **7% in 2023**.

¹ This year's report is based on 1,100 transects, an increase of 703 from 2021/2022. Samples informing this report have been collected from all Northern Ireland councils.

LEAMS



LEAMS is an alternative method of measuring litter and other indicators which is used in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Unlike the pass/ fail 'Performance Indicator', LEAMS scores are generated by assigning a value to each grade (A=3 B=2 C=1 D=0), and then calculating the average value of all the grades assigned. This average is presented as a percentage of the total available points for the transects surveyed. It differs from the Performance Indicators, in that LEAMS scores take account of how clean or littered a transect is, rather than just whether it is a pass or fail. Scores closer to 100 indicate better performance. It is easier to set a target under the LEAMS system; 66 is the point at which performance is considered acceptable, as it equates with an average grade B.



KEY

- Grade A (pass)**
Completely free of indicator (litter, detritus, graffiti etc.)
- Grade B+ (pass)**
Predominantly free of indicator apart from some small items
- Grade B (pass)**
Many small indicator items or one larger item
- Grade B- (fail)**
A few larger indicator items
- Grade C (fail)**
Many larger indicator items
- Grade C- (fail)**
Accumulations of larger indicator items
- Grade D (fail)**
Transect is heavily affected by indicator, both widespread and accumulated

The rings (left) show the percentage of transects surveyed that were allocated each of the seven grades available (see key above).

Litter Pollution Index (LPI) denotes the percentage of transects that failed to meet acceptable standards.

Totals may not equal 100 due to the rounding up or down of figures to make whole numbers.




² For quality assurance purposes, in 2023, grades A and B+ (high passes) have been presented together.

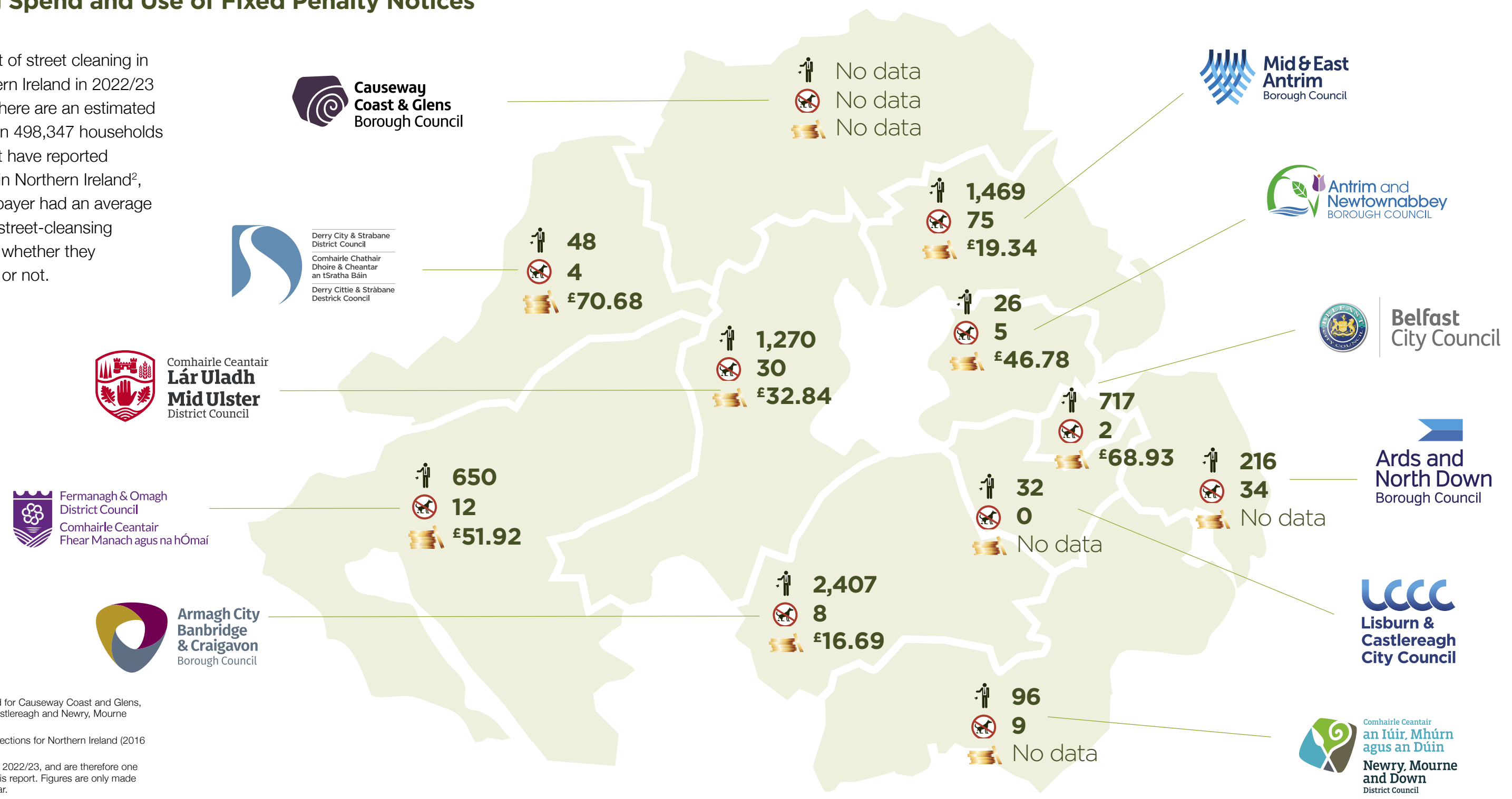


Total Cleansing Spend and Use of Fixed Penalty Notices

The overall reported cost of street cleaning in 7 councils across Northern Ireland in 2022/23 was £23,310,113.32¹. There are an estimated 1,255,569 people living in 498,347 households within the 7 councils that have reported cleansing spend figures in Northern Ireland², meaning that each rate payer had an average annual bill of £46.77 for street-cleansing services³, irrespective of whether they personally dropped litter or not.

KEY

-  Fixed penalty notices Litter
-  Fixed penalty notices Dog Fouling
-  Cost per rate payer



¹ Cleansing cost figures are not included for Causeway Coast and Glens, Ards and North Down, Lisburn and Castlereagh and Newry, Mourne and Down.
² NISRA Population and Household Projections for Northern Ireland (2016 based), 2016-2041(HHP16_NI)
³ Please note that these figures relate to 2022/23, and are therefore one year behind the figures in the rest of this report. Figures are only made available in autumn of the following year.



On the ground

Our Field Officers are out and about across Northern Ireland conducting litter surveys and working with groups to tackle our litter problem. They have been an invaluable part of putting this report together. We asked them for their expert analysis of what they have been finding out on the ground over this past year.

“Seeing the rate of dog fouling in some places can be discouraging. In this day and age, it should be straightforward for dog owners to bring a bag and pick up after their dogs. I have encountered many responsible dog owners, so we should be properly penalising those who do not pick up after their dogs.”

Gareth Lamrock

“I get to work with so many amazing young people across our schools in Northern Ireland. It is incredibly inspiring to see how seriously our youth take the climate emergency. We need to take their anger about the state of our environment and turn it into constructive action. That is what our Eco-Schools programme does, by placing a focus on climate education.”

Anna Green

“Single Use Plastics are a continuing presence in our litter. I am struck by just how many of these items I find in our cities and rural areas. These are doing real damage to our environment and wildlife. This has been a growing problem for the past few years and hopefully, by doing surveys we are getting a deeper understanding of this problem. More importantly, developing the solutions to stop it from happening altogether.”

Ben Ryan

“I am passionate about the environment and love seeing some of the creative work that community groups are doing across Northern Ireland. Working with Live Here Love Here, we are truly harnessing the best in people who just want to make a difference. My main hope for next year is that we grow

that base of amazing volunteers and support more people to do the right things and make big differences in their communities.”

Zara Hamilton

“Being a Field Officer means that you encounter many different situations and no one day is the same. Sadly, our litter problem as you have read is still costing our environment and your wallet. Tackling the cost of littering is a no-brainer to me. It makes sense all round for everyone. I want to see the schemes and proposals that are necessary implemented so that one day I get to put together a report that shows we are on top of our litter problem.”

Peter McErlean



Worst offenders 2023*



65%
Cigarette litter

after a 20% jump last year, we've dropped back to 2021 levels of 65%



62%
Confectionery litter

grew another 2% in 2023 bringing the total to 62%. This is significant increase from 2021 levels of 47%



19%
Takeaway litter

a small improvement from 26% in 2022 to 19% in 2023



54%
Drinks-related litter

an improvement to 54% in 2023 after rising to 66% in 2022



7%
Dog fouling

Increased to 7% in 2023 having fallen to 6% in 2021 and further to 2% in 2022

* The percentage reflects the number of transects surveyed that had that particular litter present.

Recommendations for Individuals, Government and Businesses

Individuals

Be active in tackling pollution

- Use less plastic and more reusable containers (bottles, cups, food containers)
- Choose products with less packaging or more recyclable packaging
- Challenge yourself to make a change in your purchasing habits.

Get involved with the local community

- Get involved with Live Here Love Here
- Adopt A Spot in your area and receive equipment and support.
- Write to your MLAs and local councillors and demand change.



Government

With the restoration of the Executive, Northern Ireland can now progress some important initiatives. These initiatives are a roadmap for this Assembly to follow for the rest of this mandate.

- **Litter legislation** We need a litter strategy. A joined-up approach is essential to tackle the causes of litter in Northern Ireland. This would need to include education, enforcement and public engagement. Litter legislation is directly linked to the Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility, as well as the Plastics Directive (part of the NI Protocol). It is extremely encouraging to see that a Litter Strategy has been referenced within the draft Northern Ireland Environmental Strategy.
- **Courts** must produce coherent guidelines for the treatment of those who litter. Fair and reasonable penalties must be applied consistently to avoid discrepancies across the various courts dealing with these cases. Fines issued by a court should never end up being less than the cost of paying a fixed penalty. Councils' costs must also form part of the payment due, for those found guilty of littering.
- **Joined up approach** for councils on litter enforcement. We propose policy across all councils to ensure that best practice on enforcement of litter and dog fouling is followed. Enforcement practices need to be fair, clear and consistent across Northern Ireland. We advocate a single NI-wide level for fixed penalty notices.

- **Deposit Return Scheme** Deposit return schemes (DRS) would see consumers paying an up-front deposit for certain items such as drinks. The return of the empty packaging/drinks containers after use would allow the deposit to be redeemed. This practice would help incentivise the correct disposal of packaging/drinks containers, as it would now have a monetary value. DRS would also greatly reduce the number of plastic items reaching our seas. It would therefore help Northern Ireland play its part in tackling marine plastic pollution and would support the good work being done to achieve Good Environmental Status for Descriptor 10 in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The joint DRS for Northern Ireland and England is due to launch in October 2027.

- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations 2024 came into force on 1 January 2025 enabling the scheme to go live in April 2025. The fees producers pay will be set for different packaging materials (plastic, card, etc) and varied to incentivise the use of recyclable packaging. Modulation of fees will mean producers will pay higher fees for packaging that they place on the market which is less recyclable. Costs to councils for packaging in street binned and littered waste is currently under consideration by devolved governments. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful would like to see the scope of the scheme widened, to ensure that duty bodies (e.g. Translink) also

benefit fairly from the shared approach to waste management. At present, duty bodies pass on these costs to customers.

- **Prioritise spending on prevention** to reduce spend on clean-up. Behaviour change through education needs to be a higher priority if we are to seriously tackle the issues of dog fouling and litter. Increasing spending on clean-up will not change behaviour. There is an opportunity for funding to be reallocated to projects and campaigns that work towards changing the behaviour of individuals as well as corporations. The Live Here Love Here Campaign is a well-established, collaborative, litter prevention platform. Through education and empowerment, it builds a sense of civic pride in our local communities. Individual actions and small scale campaigns can only, at best, achieve incremental improvements and the global crises, including marine plastic pollution, now requires transformational change. Additional litter prevention-focused investment in Eco-Schools is needed to maximise the awareness of young people and to help drive messaging into individual households.

Businesses

Sadly, investment in litter prevention from this sector has dwindled in recent years. Successful businesses will be looking at making changes even before legislation (Extended Producer Responsibility/Deposit Return Schemes) comes into force. They should be supported and encouraged to do so.

Legislation to reduce the use of Single Use Plastics is on the horizon, which will improve the situation regarding takeaway containers. Education and support for small businesses in particular needs to be increased.

Proposed solutions should have industry input.

We would encourage businesses to engage with the Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful 'Tackling Plastics' team to receive a free toolkit and would also encourage them to sign the Plastic Promise as a starting point on their journey towards sustainability and circularity. Get the ball rolling [here](#)



To discuss how we can work together to tackle littering please contact:



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