

Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report 2024/25

KEEP
NORTHERN
IRELAND
BEAUTIFUL



CLEANER
NEIGHBOURHOODS

Vape on Ardglass Beach, 2024.

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What is the Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report?

The Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report provides a 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** – anything that is dropped, discarded or thrown down by a member of the public. It includes cigarettes, confectionery wrappers, crisp bags, bottles, cans, PPE and many more things, as well as dog fouling.

- **Detritus** – comprising small, broken down particles of synthetic and natural materials. This includes dust, mud, soil, rotted leaf and vegetable residues, and fragments of twigs, glass, plastic and other finely divided materials.
- **Graffiti** – writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in, or 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, and includes stickers, bills and large posters.
- **Staining** – all the substances that mark a pavement, and 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 and Industry/

Retail Sheds. Finally, as well as providing a summary of the Northern Ireland Litter Survey, which looks at pollution indicators around the country, the report includes 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 2024 Northern Ireland litter surveys were carried out between the months of July and September. From this work we calculate two separate but related scores. 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 NI (100 surveys per council area).



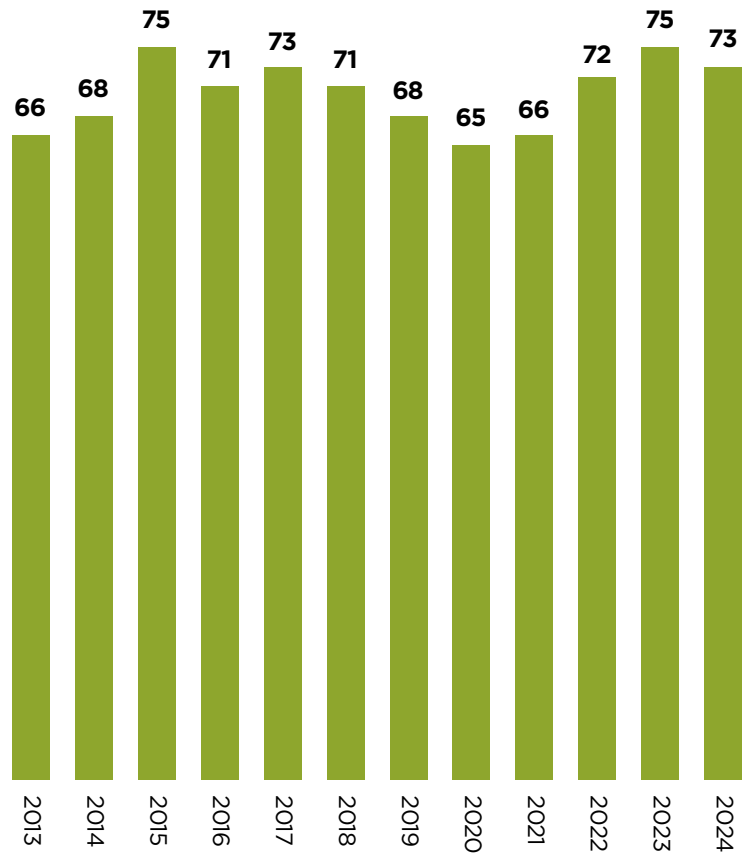
Summary

The Big Picture

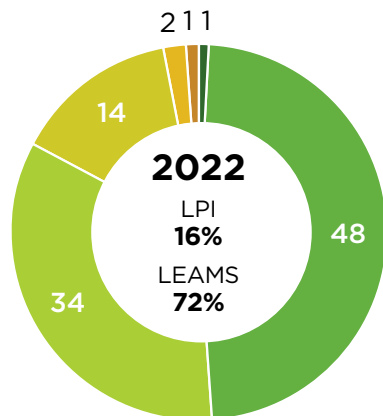
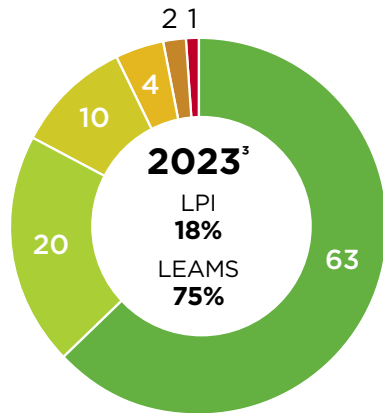
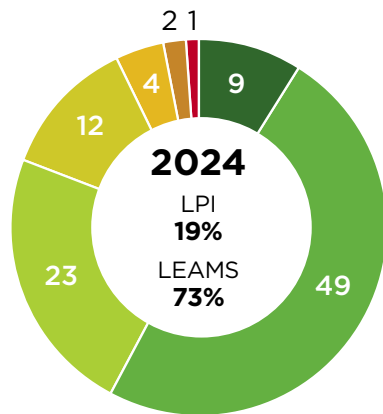
Findings and insights

- **19% of transects** surveyed in 2024 failed to reach the acceptable standard for cleanliness (Grade A to B). This is a 1% deterioration on the 2023/24 results.¹
- **The LEAMS score**, which reflects the average score out of 100 of all transects surveyed, decreased to 73%, a fall of 2% from 23/24.¹
- **Dog fouling²** – fouling decreased in 2024 to 4%, down from 7% in 2023. A positive reduction towards the 2022 figure of 2%.

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.)
- **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.

¹ This year's report is based on 1,100 transects. Samples informing this report have been collected from all Northern Ireland councils. These 1,100 surveys give a good representation of Northern Ireland, with a margin of error of +/- 3%.

² The percentage reflects the number of transects surveyed where dog fouling was present.


³ 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

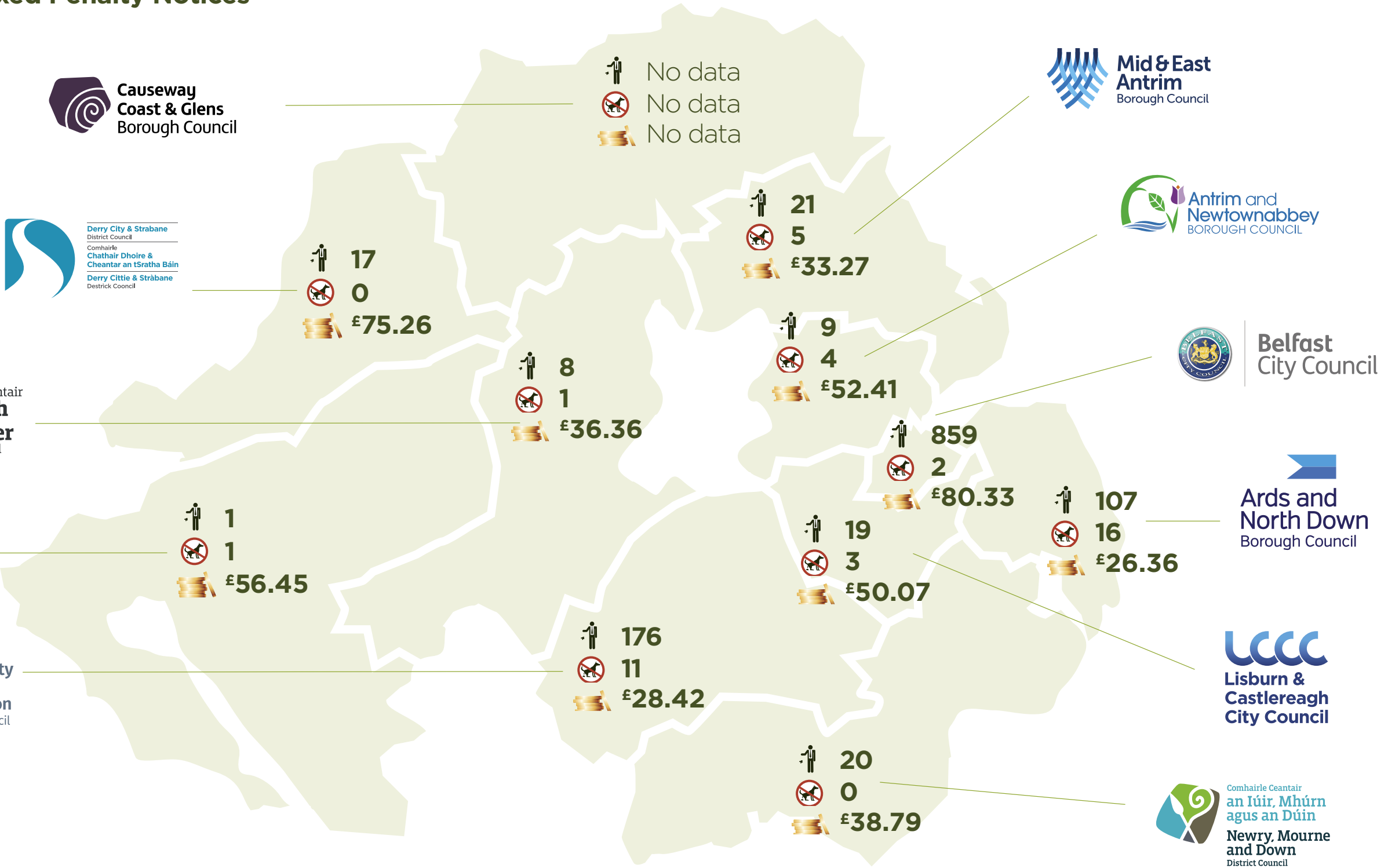
The overall reported cost of street cleaning in 10 councils across Northern Ireland in 2023/24 was £34,482,882. There are an estimated 1,752,358 people living in 697,169 households within the 10 councils that have reported cleansing spend figures in Northern Ireland, meaning that each rate payer had an average annual bill of £49.46 for street-cleansing services, irrespective of whether they personally dropped litter or not.

KEY

 Fixed penalty notices – Litter

 Fixed penalty notices – Dog fouling

 Cost per rate payer



1 Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council have not provided data for their council area.

2 NISRA Population and Household Projections for Northern Ireland (2016 based), 2016-2041(HHP16_NI)

3 Please note that these figures relate to 2023/24, 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.



The Deposit Return Scheme

The Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) is now just over a year old in the Republic of Ireland, where it came into operation in February 2024. The new initiative has delivered a real waste revolution with impressive results that Northern Ireland can take forward and should pay real attention to.

It should give us all confidence that when governments ask the public to change their behaviours and embrace change, they will respond. In August 2024, 111 million containers were returned. In the first eight months of the scheme's operation, more than 630 million containers were returned. The scale of this success demonstrates the public's appetite for building a circular economy.

A Deposit Return Scheme has had more comprehensive environmental benefits, particularly in reducing litter and the amount of single-use plastics found. This is fast becoming an essential tool in fighting Ireland's litter problem. It is helping to reduce the amount of litter that is harmful to our wildlife and other ecosystems.

Our local Executive is committed to introducing a Deposit Return Scheme for drink containers from October 2027. The success of the Deposit Return Scheme in its first year in the Republic of Ireland should give us confidence that we can also enjoy similar results in Northern Ireland.

Working together, government, business, and the environment sector can achieve impressive results in a short period of time. That's the important lesson that Ireland's Deposit Return Scheme teaches us. Northern Ireland must be ambitious and collaborative in bringing the public along with us on this journey.

The Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report tells us much about Northern Ireland's litter problem, from the costs of

inaction on essential issues to the need to change how we, the public, deal with litter and waste. Sometimes, it is easy to wonder whether we can overcome this problem. A Deposit Return Scheme is a piece of the bigger picture to resolve litter issues in Northern Ireland.

However, reading about the success of initiatives such as the Deposit Return Scheme reminds us that, through a series of practical steps, we can turn the tide on litter and improve our society.

As we embark on our journey with a Deposit Return Scheme, we can take heart from the Republic of Ireland's success and be confident in our approach to the future.

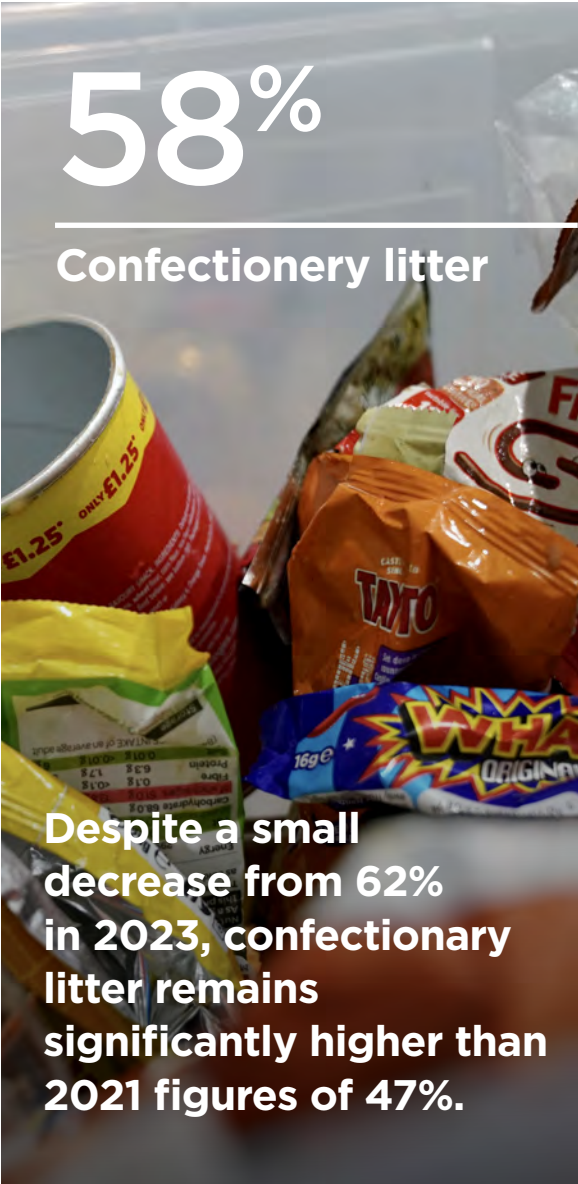


Worst offenders 2024¹

These are the four types of litter most frequently found on transects. These percentages represent the number of transects that were observed to have a certain type of litter. This is not reflective of the quantity of any litter type found within the transects, whereas LEAMS and LPI figures do reflect litter volumes.

58%

Confectionery litter



Despite a small decrease from 62% in 2023, confectionery litter remains significantly higher than 2021 figures of 47%.

53%

Cigarette related



A drop of 12% from last year, and a significant improvement from 2022 findings of 78%.

44%

Drinks



A decrease of 10% from 2023.

17%

Takeaway packaging



A small improvement from 19% in 2023.

4%

Dog fouling²



Decreased to 4% having risen to 7% in 2023.

¹ The percentage reflects the number of transects surveyed that had that particular litter present.

² Whilst dog fouling is not a 'worst offender', it is reported here as it carries its own unique enforcement penalties.

Recommendations for Individuals, Government and Businesses

In February 2024, devolution was restored in Northern Ireland after two years of collapse. Having an Executive in place is critical in helping drive forward the policy measures needed for Northern Ireland to fight the climate emergency effectively. The issues raised in this report highlight the need for the full and speedy implementation of many of the measures in the Environmental Improvement Plan, particularly in litter and a circular economy. Below are the actions within the plan that should be particular focus areas during this mandate. Northern Ireland has no more time to waste when implementing further measures that reduce litter and improve our environment.

1. Publication of the Litter Strategy in 2027

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful has long called for a litter strategy and it is welcome that this is referenced in the plan. For this strategy to be effective, it must take a joined-up approach to tackling the causes of litter. That must include detailed approaches to educating the public about the true damage that littering causes. In addition, effective joined-up enforcement measures are needed. This must continue with public engagement that seeks to change behaviours.

2. By 2030, create cleaner communities with less litter and instil civic pride within communities.

This report has highlighted the distance that Northern Ireland needs to travel to meet this goal. We still face litter issues, particularly in confectionary litter and dog fouling. Our local councils are on the frontline in our battle against litter regarding enforcement and the cost of clean-ups. This is why we endorse the goal of less litter and improving civic pride across Northern Ireland. Our Live Here Love Here campaign works with most local councils to promote these important messages and support groups to build more civic pride in our communities.

3. By 2035, bring about a societal behavioural shift, where littering is socially unacceptable and the costs for clearing litter are significantly reduced in real terms.

This report has revealed that cleaning up litter is a problem worth over £34.4 million¹ in Northern Ireland. To achieve the goal, it is important to recognise that increasing spending on clean-up will not change behaviour. Funding can be reallocated to projects and campaigns that work towards changing the behaviour of individuals and corporations.

Our Eco-Schools programme is already working with our young people to instil the importance of looking after our environment, and in 2024, the Generation Nature pilot project was launched, which will help student teachers develop practical environmental skills to manage school grounds that support biodiversity and help fight the climate emergency.

4. From 2025, phase in new UK wide Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme for packaging.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) provides a real opportunity to change how we deal with waste; it will shift packaging waste costs from local taxpayers to those who produce it. This will encourage producers to reduce their overall packaging and adopt packaging that is easier to recycle. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful welcomes the adoption of EPR measures and we urge packaging producers to take this opportunity to minimise packaging waste, especially single-use plastic and improve recyclability by resolving difficult to recycle packaging such as pringles tubes, coffee cups and sandwich packets. This will achieve the desired environmental benefits and minimise potential price increases passed on to customers.

5. From 2027, introduce a Deposit Return Scheme for drink containers.

A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) would see consumers paying an up-front deposit for specified drinks containers. Returning the empty packaging after use would allow the deposit to be redeemed. This practice would help incentivise the correct disposal of packaging, as it would now have a monetary value. DRS would also greatly reduce the number of plastic items reaching our seas. It would help Northern Ireland tackle marine plastic pollution, support the excellent work being done, and tackle some of the more commonly littered items we see in this report.

6. Prepare regulations to enable the Northern Ireland Assembly to restrict the sale or supply of ten common single-use plastic items.

Many of the items of litter highlighted in this report demonstrate the need to restrict the level of single-use plastic. The ban on single-use vapes which came into force in June 2025 is a welcome step towards reducing the amount of single-use plastics in Northern Ireland. Reducing the use of some single-use plastics can help towards driving down the amount of this type of litter we are finding.

¹ This figure excludes cleansing spend for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.



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



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