



Litter Bin Strategy
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

January 2024

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Disclaimer:

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1 Introduction

Littering is an anti-social behaviour that negatively impacts our environment. It is both a local and national problem, with 81% of respondents to a nationwide survey stating that they were angry and frustrated with the amount of litter in England¹. With more than 2 million pieces of litter being dropped in the UK every day², environmental quality is negatively impacted, which can discourage inward investment, damage local economic growth and make individuals feel less safe in their communities³. In addition to this, the management of litter is estimated to cost UK taxpayers over £1 billion per year in street cleaning⁴, therefore it is in everyone's interest to tackle this issue.

It is understood that littering is fundamentally a behavioural issue, that is encouraged by litter already lying on the ground. In addition, there may also be a perceived or real lack of bins within an area; therefore, effective and well-placed infrastructure is key to moving away from littering behaviours. Providing good infrastructure, outlining clear expectations of individuals and supporting those expectations with enforcement, can help to strengthen the social pressure to do the right thing⁵.

To help navigate the issues outlined above, a National Litter Strategy for England was developed in 2017, which focuses on education, enforcement and infrastructure. This was supplemented by guidance from the Waste & Resources Action programme (WRAP) in 'The Right Bin in the Right Place' document in October 2020. This guidance advises local authorities and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) on the design, quantity and location of public litter bins. Subsequently, local authorities have been reviewing their approach to managing litter. This document has helped to steer the development of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's ('Sandwell' or 'the Council') own Litter Bin Strategy (the Strategy).

1.1 Why is a Strategy needed?

As this is Sandwell's first Litter Bin Strategy, it is designed to coordinate the approach to litter related issues and provide a more consistent approach moving forward. There are currently a range of different litter bin types across the Borough, which have historically been installed based on intelligence provided by staff and requests from councillors and residents, rather than guided by a Strategy.

The Council wishes to reduce littering, increase recycling and improve service efficiency as part of their environmental responsibility, and in accordance with best practice and circular economy principles. Therefore, this Strategy has been developed to establish current litter practice in Sandwell and to provide guidance for installing the most appropriate litter bins and recycling bins in the most effective

¹ UNISAN. (2020) How does litter harm the environment.

² <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/faqs/advice/litter-and-law>

³ Keep Britain Tidy (2017) Journal of litter and environmental quality

⁴ <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/faqs/advice/litter-and-law>

⁵ WRAP (2020) 'Binrastructure' – The right bin in the right place

places, applying enforcement for those who continue to drop litter and educating /engaging with residents and businesses taking into consideration best practice.

The development of this Strategy also supports local policy within the Borough, including Sandwell's Corporate Plan and the draft Local Plan (currently under consultation). One of the supporting principles of the Corporate Plan is to be 'green in everything we do', which includes having a positive impact on climate change and encouraging culture change within the wider community. Some of the aspirations mentioned within the plan, which link back to the need for a Litter Bin Strategy, are as follows:

- We will strive to maintain Green Flag status, whilst also working to enhance our existing green and open spaces, create new places to play and committing to plant a tree for every child starting school in Sandwell up to 2030.
- We will recover, improve and transform our street maintenance programmes post Covid.
- We will increase recycling rates and encourage cultural change.

The vision of Sandwell's draft Local Plan is: *'It's where we call home and where we're proud to belong – where we choose to bring up our families, where we feel safe and cared for, enjoying good health, rewarding work, feeling connected and valued in our neighbourhood and communities, confident in the future, and benefitting fully from a revitalised West Midlands'*.

This vision is supported by a number of priorities, those relevant to the development of a Litter Bin Strategy are as follows:

- To protect and enhance Sandwell's natural environment, natural resources, biodiversity, wildlife corridors, geological resources, countryside and landscapes, whilst ensuring that residents have good access to interlinked green infrastructure.
- To provide a built and natural environment that protects health and wellbeing through minimising pollution (air, noise and other forms), providing healthy homes, reducing the negative health effects of climate change and providing streets safe for active, low emissions travel for all.

1.2 Approach

Throughout the Strategy development process, numerous stakeholders have been engaged with, to help determine the Strategy's content and purpose.

Initially, meetings were held with Sandwell and Serco⁶, which helped in understanding the current situation regarding litter and how this is managed within Sandwell. As well as this, litter priorities and topics for inclusion within the Strategy were discussed.

A meeting also took place with Litter Watch, a charity which focuses on education, raising environmental awareness of the implications of litter and the management of over 2,400 litter picking volunteers within the Borough. These discussions helped to provide further understanding of Litter Watch's role regarding litter within Sandwell, and from their experience, if there were any particular issues regarding litter types or hotspots.

During this process, views from residents were also sought through a 6-week public consultation. The purpose of this exercise was to gauge residents' opinions about litter in the area, how litter should be managed and where litter bins should be located. Findings from the public consultation process have been used to aid the development of the Strategy.

1.3 Structure

The Litter Bin Strategy for Sandwell is structured as follows:

- **Section 1: Introduction** describes the purpose for producing the Strategy.
- **Section 2: Background** summarises the causes and problems of littering, alongside the national policy context.
- **Sections 3 - 5: Current position and best practice** describes the existing status within Sandwell, together with best practice examples, for:
 - infrastructure
 - enforcement
 - education and engagement.
- **Section 6: Strategic vision and objectives** sets out the intention and goals of the Strategy.
- **Section 7: Actions, evaluation and monitoring** provides an overview of tasks and monitoring for litter management going forward.

⁶ As a unitary authority, Sandwell MBC is responsible for managing litter in the Borough. In 2010, the Council outsourced their waste management and street cleansing service via a contract to Serco, with this contract due to expire in 2035. As part of their remit, Serco is responsible for the installation, collection, and maintenance of litter bins within Sandwell.

2 Background

2.1 What is litter?

Keep Britain Tidy defines litter as anything from a crisp packet or cigarette butt to a bag of rubbish⁷. Litter is generally accepted to be anything below the size of a sack of household waste and is mostly understood as items related to smoking, vaping, chewing gum or eating and drinking on the move. Littering occurs where unwanted items have not been properly disposed of or have been dropped inadvertently. Over recent years, a shift in cultural attitudes means that there is a higher volume of waste (and therefore more opportunity for littering to occur), through higher levels of consumption 'on the go'.

2.2 Causes of litter

There are a number of reasons as to why people litter, these can be classified within three key areas of infrastructure, enforcement and behaviour.

Infrastructure

A lack of litter bins within an area can encourage littering behaviours, as instead of finding a bin or taking rubbish home, the easier option for some is to leave it behind. The location of litter bins is also a factor, and because littering often takes place in public places where there is less individual responsibility, it is important that infrastructure is strategically and conveniently placed (e.g. places where people congregate, near to shops and takeaways, transport hubs, schools and colleges)⁸. It is understood that the cleanliness, quality and condition of litter bins can also impact littering behaviours, as individuals will be discouraged to use bins if they appear dirty, broken or unhygienic, therefore they may resort to littering as an alternative way to dispose of their waste.

Enforcement

Enforcement measures, particularly through use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs), are used by many councils as a deterrent for littering and to nudge people to do the right thing. However, if these monetary fines are poorly publicised, or are at a low value, it is likely that littering behaviours will continue as individuals perceive no consequence for their actions.

Behaviour

A lack of environmental education and awareness can be the starting point for poor littering behaviours. If there is a limited appreciation for the environment and a lack of understanding about the environmental issues associated with littering, people will be more likely to drop litter. For some individuals, the personal benefit of throwing rubbish on the floor and not having to carry this around or find a bin, outweighs the negative impact of littering in the local environment. These careless attitudes around disposing of litter responsibly can be exacerbated by the behaviour of others. For example, if littering is frequently observed, or there is a high presence of litter on the ground, then this suggests that littering is the 'norm'. In this context, some others will follow the behaviour and act in a similar way themselves.

⁷ <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/faqs/advice/litter-and-law>

⁸ WRAP (2020). 'Binrastructure' - The right bin in the right place.

2.3 Problems caused by littering

Most obviously, litter can negatively impact our environment as it can be ingested by animals and local wildlife, as well as ending up in rivers and lakes which can pollute our waterways (and ultimately our seas and oceans). However, litter does not only have negative environmental impacts, but economic ones too, for example, through expensive clean-up costs faced by local authorities. As well as this, high levels of litter within an area can harm public perceptions of that locality, which in turn can lead to less tourism, lower house prices and discourage businesses from investing or setting up. These perceptions can also impact individuals, their health and wellbeing in a negative way.

2.4 Policy and guidance context

Certain organisations, including local councils, have a statutory duty to keep land and highways in England clear of litter and refuse as far as is practicable⁹. Acting as the litter authority, the Council may maintain litter bins in any street or public place¹⁰. A similar power exists where once these are installed, there is a duty for the authority to make arrangements for the regular emptying and cleaning of any bins that are provided¹¹.

It is an offence to throw, drop or leave litter¹², and this applies to all places that are open to the air¹³. FPNs for litter may be issued by an authorised officer of a litter authority, and if found guilty of a litter offence, a person may be fined up to level 4 on the standard scale (currently £2,500).

In April 2017, the UK government (Defra¹⁴) published the Litter Strategy for England; the Strategy had an ambition to “be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it found it”, and is based on three broad themes of education, enforcement and infrastructure. In response to the third theme and to fulfil one of the commitments to provide new guidance on ‘binrastructure’, WRAP published ‘The Right Bin in the Right Place’ in 2020. This document provides guidance to English local authorities on the design, number and location of public litter bins.

A proposal to introduce a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) in England from 2025 for single use drinks containers (excluding glass ones) may impact levels of ‘on the go’ littering¹⁵. This measure is expected to encourage individuals to not drop their empty drinks containers and instead take them to a return vending machine (RVM) and reclaim their deposit.

A summary of the key pieces of legislation that govern the management and disposal of litter, together with relevant best practice guidance, are summarised in Table 1.

⁹ Section 89 of the Environmental Protection Act (1990)

¹⁰ Section 5 of the Litter Act (1983)

¹¹ The Highways Act (1980)

¹² Section 87 of the Environmental Protection Act (1990)

¹³ Section 18 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (2005)

¹⁴ The Department of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

¹⁵ Resources and Waste Strategy (2018) and succeeding consultation

Table 1: Summary of national legislation / guidance for the litter bin Strategy and implications for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Legislation / Guidance	Summary	Implication
Environmental Protection Act (1990)	Litter is controlled under the legislative framework of the Environmental Protection Act, 1990. Section 89 placed a legal responsibility on organisations (including Local Authorities) to ensure that land, as far as is practicable, is kept clear of litter. Section 91 states that a person who is fed up with a long-standing litter problem can use a Litter Abatement Order against those organisations listed under Section 89 (the 'duty bodies') if they are failing in their duty to keep that land clean.	Provides the Council with the responsibility for managing litter.
Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (2005)	It is an offence to drop or leave litter and not pick it up on all land that is open to the air, including land covered with water and privately owned land. If guilty, fines can be up to £2,500 in a magistrate's court. Most offences are dealt with by a Fixed Penalty Notice from an authorised body (including local authorities), which are set locally between £75 - £500.	Authorises the Council to issue Fixed Penalty Notices to offenders. The principle of enforcement is embedded within the objectives of the Strategy.
Defra, Litter Strategy for England (2017)	Sets out 36 commitments and actions to deliver a substantial reduction in litter and littering within a generation by sending a clear message, cleaning up the country and improving enforcement. Keeping streets cleaner and litter free is of the utmost importance.	The need to change behaviours through education, enforcement and infrastructure underpins the Strategy.
Resources and Waste Strategy (2018)	Refers to litter as a strategic indicator for minimising waste and its impact on the environment. The Resources & Waste Strategy (R&WS) promotes valuing resources and reducing waste by changing behaviour and making it clear how to dispose of items, enabling litter to be reduced e.g. the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS)	The Strategy embraces the R&WS and takes into consideration the implications of DRS on litter.
Defra Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse for England (2019)	Based on an extensive research program. Seeks to encourage land to be kept to acceptable cleanliness standards and considerations by a court of law to what is practicable.	The principle of enforcement is embedded within the objectives of the Strategy.
WRAP (2020) Binrastructure – The Right Bin in the Right Place	Sets out a recommended approach for local authorities to litter disposal infrastructure (binrastructure), with regard to the design, number and location of public litter bins and other items of street furniture designed to capture litter.	The Strategy has been steered by guidance from WRAP's 'The Right Bin in the Right Place' guidance
Environment Act (2021)	This updates the Environment Protection Act 1990 and sets out guidance on littering enforcement.	The principle of enforcement is embedded within the objectives of the Strategy.

3 Infrastructure – current position and best practice

Sandwell currently has a large bin stock to service the area, however, these are not always placed in the most effective locations and the most appropriate type of bin may not be in use. In addition to this, in order for individuals to engage with bin infrastructure, litter bins should be easily recognisable, easily accessible, well maintained and easy to use. This section outlines the current position regarding litter bins within Sandwell, alongside infrastructural methods which the Council could adopt to effectively manage litter in the Borough, to help individuals dispose of their litter appropriately.

3.1 Status of litter bins

In order to establish how litter bin infrastructure can be managed most effectively, it is important to understand the current situation of litter bins within Sandwell. Therefore, between November 2022 and March 2023, Serco undertook a litter bin audit which recorded the location and condition of litter bins within the area. Findings of the audit show that there are currently 1,659 litter bins in Sandwell, as outlined on the map below. This also shows the number of requests for emptying of litter bins, an indication of demand on the service.

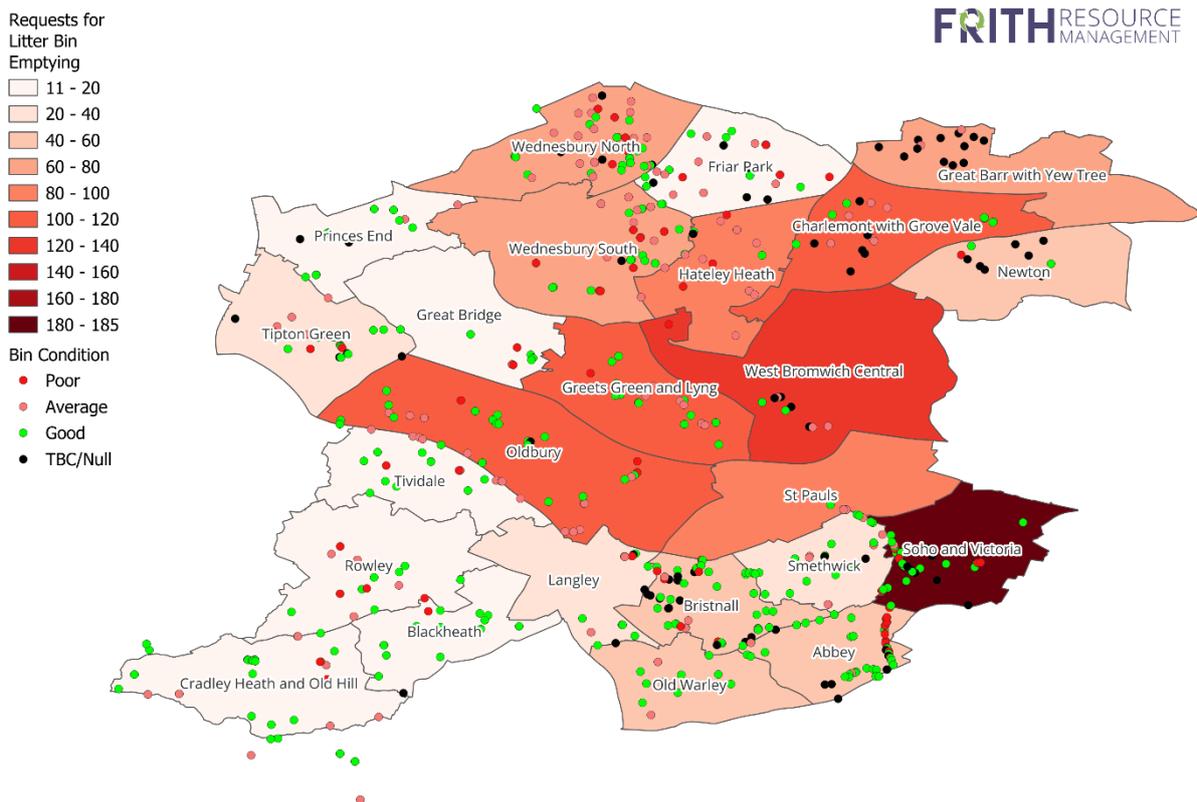


Figure 1: A map showing the wards within Sandwell, with the location and condition of litter bins, as well as levels of requests for litter bin emptying

Overall, there is a relatively good distribution of litter bins across Sandwell, as denoted by the points in Figure 1. Litter bin provision appears to be better within the areas in the North (Wednesbury North, Friar Park) and South (Bristnall, Abbey), whereas a number of the areas between this (West Bromwich Central, Great Bridge, St Pauls) have much sparser litter bin distribution, in part reflected by the nature of the area.

Almost half (c.49%) of litter bins within the Borough are of a good condition, while 25% are in average condition and 22% in poor condition¹⁶. Areas with a high proportion of litter bins in good condition include Black Heath and Old Warley, while Hatley Heath and, to an extent Wednesbury and Abbey have a high number of those in average or poor condition.

In terms of requests for litter bin emptying, Soho and Victoria had the highest rate, followed by several wards in the middle of the Borough including Oldbury, Greets Green and Lyng and West Bromwich Central, the latter of which has a low provision of litter bins as noted above.

3.2 Recycling on the go



Figure 2: Dual litter bin (general waste and mixed recycling) in Sandwell

Over recent years, recycling at home has become a common practice for many individuals, however, the opportunity to do this when 'on the go' is yet to become widespread across the country. A lack of recycling infrastructure means it can be difficult to positively reinforce the importance of recycling and integrate it into everyday behaviours and make it the 'norm'. Some barriers that authorities face to installing recycling on the go bins include higher cost of collections, as well as potentially high levels of contamination (the wrong material put in a recycling bin). A study by Valpak found that 50% of the contents of recycling in on-the-go bins were 'non-target' (i.e. wrong) materials¹⁷, meaning that limited financial value can be sought from recycling. This is an issue that Sandwell faces, as within their 132 dual bins around the Borough, contamination levels within the recycling are high and therefore this cannot always be recycled.

Despite the potential issues with recycling on the go, improvements can be made to the quality of material collected through various means. For example, positioning recycling facilities alongside litter bins gives individuals the opportunity to recycle, but also provides access to a general litter bin, which can help to reduce contamination of any recycling (Figure 2). Improved recycling on the go can also be achieved through the use of consistent colours and signage for bins and labels, as outlined in the case study below and is discussed in more detail in Section 3.4.

¹⁶ 4% of bins were awaiting classification, or no data was given.

¹⁷ Valpak (2019). Drinks Recycling On-the-Go.

Swansea City Council

In partnership with Hubbub¹⁸, the #InTheLoop campaign introduced or improved 119 recycling points. Bright colours were used for recycling bins (e.g. yellow bins for plastic bottles, cans and glass recycling bins), alongside consistent signage throughout the area. As a result, the amount of target materials collected increased from 25% to 47%, and contamination levels decreased from 75% to 53%.



3.3 Sufficient capacity

If litter bins have insufficient capacity (or are not emptied frequently enough), it is likely that levels of litter within an area will increase, and this can encourage more individuals to drop litter. Therefore, it is essential that the capacity of a bin within a given area is sufficient to meet its needs.

3.3.1 Smart bins

There are various technological solutions to providing enhanced capacity for litter bins, with these often termed ‘smart bins’. The aim of this type of infrastructure is to create efficiencies in terms of spending and staffing requirements, while reducing the amount of litter on the streets. Some smart bins have sensors installed which transmit messages when the litter bins require emptying. A number of local authorities have installed this infrastructure and have reported up to a 50% reduction in the resources required to manage litter bins within the locality¹⁹.

Another frequently cited example of a smart bin are ‘Big Belly’ bins, which have compacting abilities, effectively squashing the litter down and meaning that the frequency of emptying can be reduced due to increased overall capacity. Sandwell have installed 6 of these units within each of the major towns. These units are dual use and consist of a recycling bin and general waste bin, in line with the guidance outlined in Section 3.2 above. With this being a new initiative within Sandwell, there is limited data available to illustrate the impact of this, however the case study below highlights some of the potential advantages.



Figure 3: Dual 'Big Belly' units (general waste and mixed recycling) in Sandwell

Case Study – Big Belly Bins (London Borough of Croydon)



80 Big Belly litter bins were installed in Croydon’s town centres, particularly in high footfall locations such as district centres and stations. These litter bins have solar-powered compactors, which enables them to hold eight times as much waste as a standard street bin. Within a 6-month period following their

¹⁸ Hubbub is a social enterprise and awareness company
¹⁹ Newcastle sensor bins

installation, 2,661 Bigbelly empties were required which would equate to c. 10,000 empties of the traditional litter bins used previously. This also reduces vehicle movements and associated local air emissions.

3.3.2 Larger bins

As an alternative to standard free-standing litter bins, some local authorities have adopted 'Bin Covers' as an alternative to standard litter bins. This arrangement consists of a wheeled bin (up to 1,280L capacity) which is housed by a fabricated cover, the cover has an aperture through which litter is deposited and a door is provided to access the wheeled bin for emptying. Figures 4 and 5 below illustrate the different capacity levels for this type of infrastructure.



Figure 4: Litter Bin in Glasgow (360L capacity)



Figure 5: Recycling Litter Bin in Lambeth (1,100L capacity)

The advantages of this system are that capacity for containing litter is greatly increased compared to a standard litter bin, which means that it can be emptied less frequently and can result in considerable cost-savings. A further benefit of using such large capacity containers is that these are much less likely to be found overflowing.

3.4 Design

3.4.1 Apertures

Littering behaviours can be linked to strong feelings of repulsion for messy and dirty things, therefore it is ideal for bins to have wide, open apertures to avoid the need for contact. The inclusion of foot pedals can be useful to further reduce the level of contact with a bin (see Figure 3, bin on the right).

Visual cues can also encourage desired behaviours to encourage effective separation of items for recycling. People can be 'nudged' in the right direction by bins that have appropriately shaped apertures.

3.4.2 Colours

The use of brightly coloured bins can appear more welcoming and are also more visible, particularly for those who are visually impaired. Should coloured bins be used, it is important that these are consistent to clearly show the materials that can be accepted. As part of the national Recycle Now brand, iconography (Figure 6) with colours denoting different material types has been developed, and this is now widely used and is becoming more recognised by the public²⁰.



Figure 6: Iconography from the national Recycle Now brand

Litter bins can also become more easily identifiable through the use of consistent container design, as it will provide clarity to the public as to where they should deposit their litter or materials for recycling. This provides the Council with the opportunity of using any corporate colour scheme which may be thematic and can be reflected throughout an area; it is also possible to incorporate any logo or signatory device onto the containers if this is required.

3.4.3 Signage

It is understood that a perceived lack of litter bins within an area can be attributed to higher levels of littering. Although, there may be infrastructure present that has not been clearly observed. Improved signage to make individuals aware of where litter bins are can help to alleviate this problem. Installation of litter bin signage is particularly important within high footfall areas, to make expectations clear. It is also important within towns which may have a higher number of tourists/visitors who may not be familiar with where litter bin facilities are located.

²⁰ WRAP (2020). 'Binrastructure' - The right bin in the right place.

Case Study – Green Footprints (various councils)

Keep Britain Tidy has worked with a number of councils to encourage better use of litter bins through installing signage. Green footprints were placed on the ground to direct the public to their nearest litter bin, nudging them to dispose of their waste responsibly rather than leaving it on the ground. Across the numerous sites, a 15.9% reduction in litter on the ground was observed over a three-week period, following the introduction of the green footprints.



3.4.4 Maintenance

Frequent maintenance of litter bins, through cleansing and repair is essential in encouraging their use.

As previously noted, if litter bins appear to be dirty, it is much more likely that littering will occur as individuals will be deterred from using the bin. This highlights the need for an effective cleansing schedule.

In addition to this, poorly maintained bins, which may be broken or rusting, are likely to have the same effect, as these may appear to be unsafe to use. Maintenance of any signage on the bin, which may give detail of what materials can be deposited, is also important in order to avoid any confusion amongst individuals.



Figure 7: Dual litter bin (general waste and mixed recycling) in Sandwell which requires maintenance.

3.5 Provision for common litter types

3.5.1 Chewing gum



Figure 8: Dedicated litter bin for chewing gum disposal

Chewing gum as a source of litter is a particular problem for local authorities. Apart from its obvious visual impact which detracts from the perception of cleanliness, it is an extremely persistent material. On the basis that prevention is better than cure (e.g. discouraging the careless discarding of gum), it is possible to install specially designated receptacles for the deposit of chewing gum (Figure 8). In general, these are smaller versions of litter bins and are designated for use as gum bins by appropriate graphics. Often a humorous or off-beat message approach can be used to draw the attention of the public to the gum-bins to encourage their usage.

Case Study – Gum Bins (Herefordshire Council)

Herefordshire Council participated in a 6-month trial of Gumdrop bins, which aim to reduce the quantity of chewing gum litter. Chewing gum can be discarded in the bin, and once full, the bin alongside its contents is recycled and processed to create new Gumdrop bins. 18 of these bins were installed within the authority area, and a 39% reduction in chewing gum litter was observed.



As the provision of gum bins and publicity discouraging the dropping of gum is not always successful, remedial action is often called for. This involves the physical removal of gum by a variety of means, including high pressure washing and steam removal scarifying. Commonly, all of these methods are expensive, particularly in relation to the price of the deposited gum.

3.5.2 Cigarette butts

Cigarette butts are also a commonly littered item, with a study showing that there is a piece of smoking related litter every 7 metres, with cigarette butts accounting for 66% of all littered items²¹.

A particular characteristic of butts is that they are constructed of a variety of materials, many of which do not readily decompose and this inevitably means that they are highly visible. To address the problem and raise the profile of discarded butts, some general litter bins are fitted with cigarette stubbing plates and signed accordingly. In some cases, dedicated ‘Butt Bins’ are provided, with appropriate signage to reinforce the message of ‘Don’t Drop Your Butts’.



Figure 9: Dedicated litter bin for cigarette butt disposal

In recent years, more engaging ways of encouraging the public to dispose of cigarette butts responsibly have been developed. Ballot Bins are a successful example of this and are discussed in the case study below.



Case Study – Ballot Bins (various councils)

Developed by Hubbub, the Ballot Bin aims to increase engagement with residents to reduce the littering of cigarette butts. A question is asked on the ballot bin, and users are able to ‘vote’ by choosing one of two slots to dispose of their cigarette butt. This concept was first introduced during a six-week trial on Villiers Street in London, where the number of smokers throwing their butts on the floor decreased by 20%. It has since been replicated in a range of areas and is thought to cut this type of litter by up to 46%.

²¹ Keep Britain Tidy (2020). Litter Composition Analysis.

3.5.3 Dog waste

Dog waste is another type of commonly occurring litter. It is particularly unpleasant and can cause problems if not properly managed. It also effects public perception in respect of the general cleanliness of an area. Local authorities have in the past provided specially designed bins for the deposit of bagged dog-fouling waste, as shown in Figure 10.

Currently in Sandwell, there are 443 dedicated litter bins for dog waste, these are usually free-standing units or are mounted onto railings / lampposts. However, it is now more commonplace to see combined litter and dog-fouling bins as a co-mixed arrangement, rather than dedicated dog waste bins, as there are no compelling reasons to provide separate dog-waste bins.



Figure 10: Dedicated litter bin for dog waste disposal

3.6 Management of bin requests

As previously noted, there are currently no criteria to manage bin requests against; therefore, litter bins may not always be placed in the most effective locations. It is in Sandwell's best interest to deny litter bin requests where they are not required, as the addition of every litter bin comes with additional costs for emptying and maintenance.

There are many approaches taken by local authorities when determining whether to accept or deny a litter bin request. Some councils choose to take a view of bin fill/litter data, while others consider footfall and proximity to existing bins.

An increasingly common approach, which covers most of the above, is to implement a points-based scoring system, where a series of questions are asked, and the answers to these accumulate a certain number of points. Certain thresholds are developed alongside this, to determine the outcome of the request.

A proposed scoring matrix is presented as **Appendix A**.

4 Enforcement – current position and best practice

Local authorities often have varying attitudes to enforcement, depending on local circumstances, policies and priorities. Some take a robust approach to enforcement on litter and related offences, while others have a lighter-touch approach and rely more upon persuasion. Despite the positive influence that education, engagement and appropriate infrastructure can have on reducing levels of litter, it does not impact everyone and therefore enforcement is sometimes required to encourage a change to littering behaviours. Potential activity which may require enforcement by the Council include littering, fly-tipping, failure to deal with accumulations of waste at domestic or business premises, and / or failure to keep areas around premises clear.

4.1 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs)

There are various means of enforcement available to Sandwell Council, which include providing advice to potential offenders, issuing written warnings, issuing notices requiring action and issuing Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). Sandwell currently undertake enforcement for littering through use of FPNs, the full price of a littering FPN in Sandwell is £75. The number of FPNs issued by the Council between April 2021 and June 2023 is outlined below.

Table 2: Number of FPN's issued by Sandwell Council between April 2021 and June 2023

Timeframe	Number of FPN's issued by Sandwell
April 2021 – March 2022	10
April 2022 – March 2023	9
April 2023 – June 2023	1

Although some enforcement activity regarding littering is currently taking place, Sandwell issue low numbers of FPNs to its residents on an annual basis. This relatively low level of enforcement may lead to the public perception that individuals can litter and face no consequences, meaning that individuals are likely to continue doing this. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to enforce against litter offenders and make it clear that littering will be taken seriously.

It also important to ensure that residents are aware of the value of FPNs and what they can be issued for. If all residents are aware of the extent of enforcement activity, it may deter negative behaviours. Awareness of FPNs and litter enforcement can be raised through a variety of means, including campaigns / posts on social media and signs within the locality (or on litter bins as currently done in Sandwell, Figure 11).

In order to further encourage individuals to consider their behaviours, increasing the value of FPNs may also be considered. Following the introduction of a statutory instrument by government in July 2023, the upper limit for a FPN for those caught littering is £500.



Figure 11: Litter bin in Sandwell which outlines the FPN in place for littering.

4.2 Increased monitoring

Ensuring that those who litter are frequently prosecuted is important in order to create a non-tolerance approach to littering within Sandwell. If it is perceived by the public that enforcement activity is not often pursued, individuals are more likely to litter as it will be assumed that their actions will have no consequences.

In order to prosecute more frequently, it is likely that more resources will be required to make this happen. Implementing increased resources to tackle littering will come at a cost to the Council, however if littering can be reduced through these means, then savings are likely to be achieved through reduced clean-up costs.

Increased prosecution of litterers could be achieved through heightened installation and monitoring of CCTV, or the introduction of patrol units / litter wardens. For the latter approach, some local authorities have taken the steps of employing external enforcement agencies to take appropriate action. This typically includes issuing FPNs or preparation of cases for prosecution of relevant offences. The use of external agencies for the above work is not always welcomed by local communities and can be the source of conflict.

5 Engagement and education – current position and best practice

It is thought that a movement away from littering behaviours can be achieved through having clear expectations of the public and motivating them to do the right thing. In addition to this, if individuals are aware of the harm that littering can cause, they are more likely to stop undertaking these behaviours. Therefore, engaging and educating residents is key to improving litter issues in Sandwell.

5.1 Community engagement

Littering is a local issue, meaning that the people of Sandwell have a vital part to play in tackling this; therefore, it is important for local communities to feel empowered in identifying their priorities and taking appropriate action.

5.1.1 Public consultation exercise

To engage with residents and provide opportunity for them to input into the Litter Bin Strategy development, the Council held a public consultation survey, 'Managing Litter in Sandwell'. The consultation ran for a 6-week period between 20th September – 1st November 2023 and sought to understand residents' views about litter in the area, how litter should be managed and where litter bins should be located.

Several key themes emerged from responses to the public consultation survey, which have been considered throughout the development of this Strategy.

Table 3: Key themes identified in the 'Managing Litter in Sandwell' consultation, 20th September – 1st November 2023

Key Theme	Issue
Community perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern about litter • Negatively impacts natural environment and animals and local resident's health and well-being • Litter encourages more litter (e.g. bin collections dropping litter) • Litter reflects lack of pride in the area • Litter saddens people and makes them ashamed of the area
Concerning litter types / littering hotspots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takeaway, general litter, dog mess • Outside fast food, takeaways and convenience stores (lack of bins) • Outside shops, within public spaces and near transport links (car stopping areas, bus stops, metro stations, canals)
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding litter and dog waste can go in the same bin • Understanding incorrect recycling contaminates entire bin • Required for all residents, including children
Enforcement & signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage for littering penalties • Signage for where bins can be found • Fine for littering • Cameras in litter hotspots to assist enforcement
Litter bin types, maintenance and size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All respondents (97%) would use bins with recycling opportunities • Council focus should be 'Visible bins in good condition' and 'emptying litter bins regularly' • More litter bins required, including dog waste bins • Bigger bins suggested, as well as increased maintenance and more regular emptying
Litter pickers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectation litter pickers will clean up after people. • Recognised for work done, potentially paid. • Should involve children as form of education
Other waste issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More frequent street cleansing • Removed bins encourages fly tipping, bulky waste collections potential solution

5.2 Engagement with voluntary organisations and businesses

It is important to engage with a range of organisations operating within Sandwell, both to gain their insight about issues regarding littering, and also to reinforce the message that everyone is responsible. Engaging with these groups provides opportunity to bring a range of different stakeholders together.

5.2.1 Litter Watch

An example of a successful voluntary organisation within Sandwell is Litter Watch, an award-winning, community led charity. The charity, which is jointly funded by Sandwell Council and Serco, focuses on education and raising environmental awareness, particularly on the implications of litter, as well as managing litter pick volunteers. The Council works closely with Litter Watch and directs all litter picking queries to them.

Litter Watch was originally set up in 1997 following litter concerns by three residents, the organisation has since grown to have two members of staff and over 2,400 volunteer litter pickers. In January 2020 there were 138 litter pickers, but the covid and post-covid period saw a 20-fold increase in volunteers, which reflects residents' understanding, appreciation and desire to care for their local environment. Litter Watch also operates an 'Adopt a Street' scheme, which encourages volunteers to adopt their street and pledge to keep it litter free. On average, Litter Watch volunteers collect 2,000 bags of rubbish a month (1,000 are reported, and it is estimated that a further 1,000 bags are collected). Commending the work of the litter pickers, the Chief Officer of Litter Watch commented that "...without our volunteers, Sandwell would be swimming in litter...".

5.2.2 Businesses

Packaging from on-the-go items, such as confectionary packs, drinks bottles/cans and takeaway litter, make up a large amount of the litter found on our streets²²; therefore, it is essential to engage businesses and operators who sell such items.

Typically, businesses are keen to co-operate with local authorities to help keep the immediate locality in a clean and tidy manner. To this end, businesses may provide their own litter bins (on private land) or may clean-up areas around their premises. Done as a good will gesture, this is often perceived in a favourable light by the local community. More businesses may be encouraged to get involved if bin sponsorship is offered, which would allow a company to advertise on litter bins. This would provide businesses with a good publicity opportunity, creating a positive impression of themselves in relation to their approach to litter and helping the environment.

In cases where businesses are believed to be responsible for creating litter problems and persuasion and discussion is not effective, there are several enforcement powers that can be used. Certain businesses can be served with a notice, such as a Community Protection Notice (CPN), by the Principal Litter Authority (PLA)²³ which requires the business to take certain steps to mitigate the effects of litter or to make arrangements to clear litter which arises within a set distance of the business premises.

²² Local Environment Quality Survey of England 2017/18

²³ In this case, Sandwell Council

5.3 Communications campaigns

Campaigns are an effective and engaging way to get messages across to residents, in order to raise awareness about issues such as littering.

Sandwell run an annual, borough-wide campaign entitled the Big Spring Clean, which brings communities together to clean up litter within the local area. The campaign, which is run by the Council, Serco and Litter Watch, has been running for 17 years and is Sandwell's biggest mass-action environmental campaign. The Council also support a similar national campaign, the Great British Spring Clean, which is organised annually by Keep Britain Tidy.

Distribution of anti-littering messaging is also undertaken through the Council's social media platforms, and this also includes campaigns around dog mess and fly-tipping. An example of a social media campaign posted to Sandwell Council's Facebook page is shown below in Figure 12.



Figure 12: An anti-littering campaign posted to Sandwell's social media channels

5.4 Schools / Education

While it is thought that all age groups contain individuals who litter, research has shown that younger people are the most likely to drop litter, particularly teenagers and young adults²⁴. So, while educating everyone about the issues associated with litter, particular emphasis is needed within younger age groups, to steer cultural change and reinforce the social norm against littering.

Litter Watch, working on behalf of the Council and Serco, work with primary and secondary schools across Sandwell. Litter Watch undertake interactive education workshops designed to raise awareness amongst children and young people about the environment and the important role they can play. The workshops are regularly reviewed with teachers, in order to align with the national curriculum.

²⁴ Litter Strategy for England

6 Strategic vision and objectives

The vision and objectives for the Strategy build on current and best practice (Sections 3 – 5), the results of the litter bin consultation (Section 5.1.1) and national legislation (Section 2.4). They are also in line with local policy within Sandwell (Section 1.1), including the Sandwell Corporate Plan and the draft Local Plan (currently under consultation).

6.1 Strategic vision

The strategic vision for the Litter Bins Strategy for Sandwell is:

Sandwell to be a clean and tidy environment, which is free of litter, fly-tipping, and dog waste

OR

To create a litter free environment which the Sandwell community can be proud of

OR

Sandwell to be a clean and tidy environment, which is free of litter, fly-tipping, and dog waste, that the Sandwell community can be proud of

6.2 Objectives

In order to achieve the vision as set out above, a number of objectives have been developed, which sit beneath the three key themes of the Strategy (Sections 3 – 5).

6.2.1 Infrastructure

1. Reduce littering and improve the cleanliness of Sandwell by providing the appropriate bin in the appropriate location.

Reduce littering and improve the cleanliness of Sandwell by improving service performance through appropriate maintenance, emptying, monitoring and signage.

OR

Reduce littering and improve the cleanliness of Sandwell by providing the appropriate bin type and size, which is in the appropriate location, with adequate signage, and improving service performance. (or improving appropriate maintenance, emptying and monitoring).

6.2.2 Enforcement

- 3. Introduce signage to increase awareness and provide details of enforcement powers which will be used against offenders / improve enforcement by exercising Council powers to deal with litter and dog fouling.**

OR

Improve enforcement, by exercising Council powers to deal with litter, fly tipping and dog fouling and increase signage, where appropriate

OR

Use litter, fly tipping and dog fouling enforcement powers and signage as tools to change the future behaviour of offenders.

4. Increase awareness of litter, fly tipping and dog fouling penalties and bin locations with appropriate signage.

6.2.3 Engagement and education

5. Reduce littering and improve the cleanliness of Sandwell by working with businesses, particularly in hot spots.
6. Reduce littering and improve the cleanliness of Sandwell by working with organisations and Volunteers (such as Litter Watch, Canal and River Trust).
7. **Change the behaviour of people who feel it is acceptable to drop litter through education, social media campaigns and working with schools.**

OR

Minimise the proportion of people who feel it is acceptable to litter, fly tip and not pick up after their dog through education, awareness campaigns and working with schools.

8. To continue and establish partnership working with organisations, communities, schools, and businesses, to extend the capacity for action to address the problems of litter, fly tipping and dog waste.

7 Actions

The following actions are proposed to implement the vision and objectives.

7.1 Infrastructure

- **Infrastructure database** – Use the information from the recent litter bin audit, baseline assessment and consultation to set up a simple database of infrastructure, including litter bin types (e.g. dual waste and recycling bins, dog waste bins etc.) /quantity/condition/location/size, disposal behaviour and public perception of the Borough.
- **Infrastructure database review** - Establish a regular review and update of the infrastructure database, and undertake maintenance where required to ensure that litter bins are in a good, usable condition (e.g. bins that appear dirty and poorly maintained get less use).
- **Litter bin protocol** - Introduce a litter bin protocol and develop criteria to provide a decision-making tool to manage and determine new litter bin requests and replacement bins.
- **Litter bin provision** - Review the suitability, location, condition and type of bin designs (e.g. dog waste bins, dual waste and recycling bins) and develop a schedule for replacement where necessary. Also expand the provision of recycling litter bins alongside general litter bins within the Borough (utilising the database, hotspot map etc.), ideally with consistency in the colour, signage and labelling used (e.g. use of the national Recycle Now iconography, and consistent colours to denote the materials which can be disposed of within litter bins).
- **Litter bin signage** - Review the requirement for litter bin signage and introduce this for where litter bins can be found, particularly in litter hotspots (e.g. green footprints).
- **Litter monitoring** - Monitor and record the fill level of all litter bins within the Borough, recycling contamination (e.g. in the 132 dual waste and recycling bins and 6 dual Big Belly bins), the amount and type of litter collected, and requests to empty litter bins. Amend the emptying schedule as necessary so that it remains suitable and effective, and to ensure that no litter bin, or its contents, becomes a nuisance or gives reasonable grounds for complaint.
- **Hotspot identification** - Increase monitoring of litter and fly tipping levels, to help identify hotspots (working with Serco and Litter Watch).

7.2 Enforcement

- **Enforcement action** – Take enforcement action when there is evidence to suggest an offence has been committed e.g. issuing FPNs for littering and small-scale fly tipping offences. (There can be a fine line between littering and small-scale fly-tipping, which was apparent in the litter consultation as both terms were interchangeably used by respondents, although fly-tipping is often associated with a desire to avoid the potential costs of waste-disposal. E.g. the deposit of a single black plastic sack of rubbish could be considered a littering offence, rather than fly tipping.)
- **FPN value** – Review the value of FPNs (e.g. currently £75 - £100, but could be up to £500), to further deter individuals from dropping litter.

- **Transparency** – Promote transparency and accurate reporting of enforcement action against littering, so that offenders know they will be punished if they are caught. E.g. publicising on social media or using signage to raise awareness of enforcement powers which can be used against those who litter.
- **Working with stakeholders** – Acknowledge people who are doing the right thing and continue working with stakeholders to tackle fly-tipping and litter hotspots, including through use of re-deployable CCTV cameras to capture evidence and serve as a deterrent and/or litter wardens.

7.3 Engagement and education

- **Consultation and Strategy findings** - Engage with the community on the findings of the litter bin consultation and the Strategy.
- **Regular engagement** - Regularly engage with the community, businesses, schools and colleges through awareness campaigns which focus on litter and the actions which are being taken (bin sponsorship and improvements, the Big Spring Clean campaign, Great British Spring Clean campaign etc.)
- **Community engagement** - Continue community education with anti-littering messaging etc. on social media and newsletter channels.
- **Business engagement** - Engage with businesses regarding potential bin sponsorship and to support businesses in keeping their locality free of litter, particularly for those prone to directly and indirectly producing high volumes of litter (e.g. takeaway rubbish).
- **Schools and colleges engagement** - Continue engagement and educational workshops (curriculum checked) with all primary and secondary schools in Sandwell, which may be delivered through the partnership with Litter Watch.
- **Litter Watch** - Continue to engage with, support and provide funding to Litter Watch.
- **Litter picker promotion** - Promote the work of litter pickers, and the positive impact they make through Council social media channels/website/newsletter etc.
- **Litter picking with schools/colleges** - Engage with schools and colleges (potentially via Litter Watch) to encourage young people to take part in litter picking.
- **Litter hotspots** - Utilise information from the recent Serco bin audit, the litter bin consultation and volunteer organisations (e.g. the Canal and River Trust / Litter Watch through their Adopt a Street scheme) to identify litter hotspots.
- **Businesses in hotspots** - Develop and maintain a list of businesses in hotspots.
- **Complaint reporting** - Continue to provide a platform for residents to report litter and fly tipping and monitor the number of complaints.

8 Summary

The following table summarises the actions proposed for the Council together with monitoring to evaluate their progress to achieve their litter vision and objectives (section 6).

Table 4: Summary of proposed actions, monitoring and evaluation indicators, categorised by key themes, to achieve the Sandwell's litter vision and objectives.

Key theme	Action	Monitoring	Optimal Reporting frequency
Overall		Establish routine audits using a standard checklist to ensure the actions and monitoring is taking place	Annually
Infrastructure	Infrastructure database, infrastructure database review	Develop (and once established, review) a simple litter bin database to establish the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type, condition, location and size of litter bins - Fill level of litter bins / overflow - Collected tonnage from litter bins 	6-monthly
	Litter bin protocol	Develop (and once established, review) a litter bin protocol to manage and determine new litter bin requests and replacement bins	6-monthly
	Litter bin provision	Review the suitability, location, condition and type of bin designs and develop a schedule for replacement where necessary.	6-monthly
	Litter bin signage	Review the requirement for litter bin signage, and introduce this where necessary	6-monthly
	Litter monitoring	Monitor the number of requests to empty litter bins, and refine emptying schedule as necessary	6-monthly
	Hotspot identification	Identify litter hotspots using the litter bin database, findings from the litter bin consultation and working with volunteer organisations	6-monthly
Enforcement	Enforcement action	Monitor the number of FPNs issued for litter offences by type	Quarterly
	FPN value	Review the value of FPNs and amend as necessary	Annually
	Transparency	Provide regular updates via the Council's website/social media/newsletter about enforcement action being taken against litter offenders in Sandwell	Quarterly
	Working with stakeholders	Acknowledge people who are doing the right thing, and engage with stakeholders to tackle fly-tipping and litter hotspots	Quarterly
Engagement and education	Consultation and Strategy findings, regular engagement	Provide regular updates via the Council's website /social media/newsletter about findings from the Strategy and litter bin consultation, and actions	Quarterly

Key theme	Action	Monitoring	Optimal Reporting frequency
		being taken within Sandwell to improve littering (maintenance, enforcement etc.)	
	Community engagement	Continue to provide community education through use of anti-littering messaging via the Council's website/social media/newsletter	Quarterly
	Business engagement, businesses in hotspots	Engage with businesses, particularly those situated in litter hotspots, to ensure provisions are in place to manage and remove litter from premises. Keep a record of engagement.	On-going
	Schools and colleges engagement, litter picking with schools/colleges	Engage with at least 2 primary schools and 2 secondary per term to provide educational workshops re. litter and promote litter picking	Each Academic Term
	Litter Watch	Continue to regularly engage and review financial support to Litter Watch	Annually
	Litter picker promotion	Promote the work of litter watch, litter pickers and support encouraging new volunteers, and the positive impact they make through Council social media channels/website/newsletter etc.	Quarterly
	Litter hotspots	Engage with Litter Watch on hotspots, litter pickers and bin condition as part of the litter bin database review	Annually
	Complaint reporting	Monitor the number of complaints about litter, including areas such as M6 into Wednesbury (which was highlighted in the consultation) and publicise.	6-monthly