



# Dog Fouling

POSITION STATEMENT

## What is Dog Fouling?

Dog fouling occurs when a dog fouls a public space and the owner does not make an effort to clean it up or dispose of the waste properly. Fouling is a common form of litter in Northern Ireland and the most complained about by the public. Problems with this form litter can extend from owners either ignoring dog mess completely, or picking it up and not disposing of it properly (e.g. leaving a poo bag on the side of a road).

This litter can have serious implications for public health as it is commonly found in parks and other recreational areas where children play. Coming into contact with dog droppings containing the parasitic roundworm *Toxocara canis* can lead to serious illness in anyone, but is especially dangerous for children, who can become permanently blind as a result.

## DEVELOPING OUR POSITION

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, working with local councils, has been consistently leading awareness campaigns around this issue. We have been engaging with policy-makers in the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), local councils and other civic groups over the issue of dog fouling and its impact across Northern Ireland.

We have been surveying the rates of dog fouling in our Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report for each council area for more than a decade. We have solid data that allows us to track the rates of fouling across Northern Ireland, allowing us to develop informed views on this subject. There has been some success in this area over the last two years: in 2017/18 a drop was reported in all areas apart from the areas designated as “Main Roads” and “High Obstruction Residential.” There has also been an improvement in rates of dog fouling across eight different land uses over the past two years, but note that recreational areas appeared to suffer the most.<sup>i</sup> We welcome the opportunity to continue to raise awareness on this issue and the success in achieving a reduction in rates of dog fouling since 2015, however we believe that more can be done and greater advances in tackling this problem can be made.

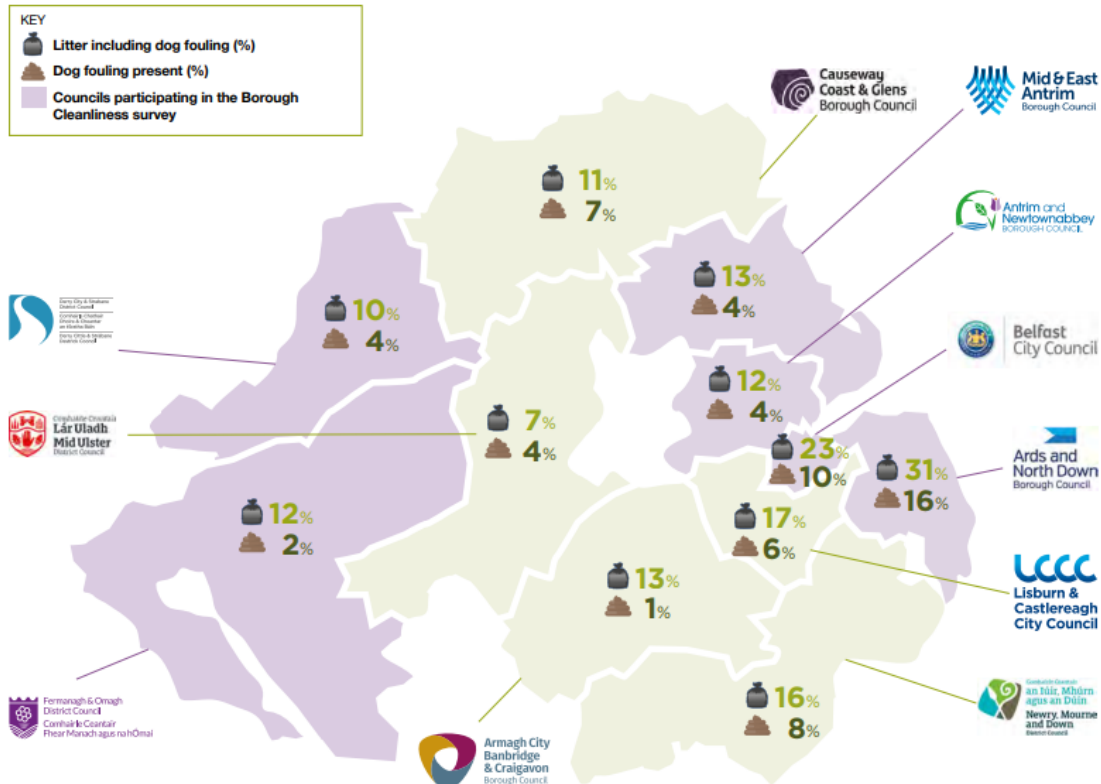
We have also worked with councils on various different initiatives, providing materials and advice on how to craft effective behaviour change campaigns.

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful is still concerned that dog fouling remains a prevalent and emotive issue and believes that strong enforcement along with programmes to encourage behaviour change are critically important.

## Dog Fouling rates by Council Area

### Transects badly affected by litter or dog fouling

The percentage of transects which fall below the required standard for litter, and the percentage of transects on which dog fouling was observed in each Council area.



## Government Action against Dog Fouling

Scotland - The Dog Fouling Act of 2003 makes not cleaning up after your dog illegal. Two years ago, the fixed penalty for leaving dog fouling was increased to £80, and can in some cases lead to conviction and a fine of up to £500. Keep Scotland Beautiful have developed an action plan with various stakeholders to keep a focus on this issue and monitor sites across Scotland.<sup>ii</sup>

Wales - Dog fouling penalties are administered by local authorities in Wales. Dog owners have a legal duty to pick up faeces left by their dog in public spaces. If they do not, they can be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice or on-the-spot fine. Our sister organisation Keep Wales Tidy has undertaken a review of the interventions to tackle dog fouling which brings together the latest research, innovations and interventions to tackle the issue.<sup>iii</sup>

England - Dog fouling penalties are also administered by local authorities in England. Public Space Protection Orders are in place to give councils the ability to enforce fines and ensure that dogs are properly controlled. Keep Britain Tidy has conducted research on why some dog owners allow their dogs to foul and have advocated that councils make better use of the Public Space Protection Orders. Dog fouling represents a real cost to the public purse and an estimate from 2005 puts local authority costs of clearing up dog waste at around £22 million a year.<sup>iv</sup>

Northern Ireland - Dog fouling penalties are administered by local authorities in Northern Ireland. If you let your dog foul a public place the local council can give you an on-the-spot fine of £80. If you refuse to pay the fine the council can prosecute you in court for allowing dog fouling. Monitoring of the rates of dog fouling is completed in each council and compiled in Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful's Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report.

## Our Position

- Tackling dog fouling should be included as part of a comprehensive litter strategy.
- Progress has been made on this issue but we need to keep up pressure and invest in public awareness and behaviour change campaigns.
- Local authorities should use all of the powers at their disposal through fines, prosecutions and other measures to make sure those involved in this practice are punished and others deterred.
- We support the requirement for mandatory training if found guilty of an environmental offence.
- A decrease in dog fouling would be beneficial for public health, quality of life and our economy.

## Our recommendations

- An extension of campaigns such as “Scoop that Poop” in Ards and North Down Borough Council that encourages owners to pick up after their dog and report those who don't.

- Include hard hitting information in all puppy packs and dog licensing information to all dog owners.
- Emphasis should be placed on behaviour change campaigns. Our data shows it is more cost effective to get more people cleaning up after their dogs than merely installing more bins.
- Councils should work for a consensus over application of enforcement practices. Harmonisation across the council areas will help send a clear message to offenders and stop confusion amongst the general public. Awareness of fines issued through promotion via social media channels should be increased and should occur regularly.

### Our Actions

- Annual Cleaner Neighbourhood Surveys carried out to monitor overall levels of dog fouling. The data goes into an annual report and is published online.
- Liaise with other like-minded organisations such as Keep Scotland Beautiful, Keep Britain Tidy and Keep Wales Tidy to help increase awareness of this issue.
- Continue providing support to community groups tackling issues such as dog fouling through the Live Here Love Here Small Grants Scheme.
- Continue supporting Green Flag for Parks and raising awareness of the need to protect public parks and green spaces.

### Conclusion

Dog fouling is one of the most prominent, unpleasant and dangerous forms of litter. There has been some welcome progress on this issue since 2016, however further gains can be made through an emphasis on public awareness campaigns and fines for offenders. Adding to current approaches with environmental education and greater cooperation between local authorities can help ensure that dog fouling rates continue to fall.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.etinu.net/cgi-bin/generic?instanceID=48>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.keepscotlandbeautiful.org/local-environmental-quality/clean-up-scotland/the-problems/dog-fouling/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.keepwalestidy.cymru/dog-fouling>

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<sup>iv</sup>[http://www.keepbritainty.org/sites/default/files/resource/Keep%20Britain%20Tidy%20Policy%20Position\\_Dog%20Fouling.pdf](http://www.keepbritainty.org/sites/default/files/resource/Keep%20Britain%20Tidy%20Policy%20Position_Dog%20Fouling.pdf)