

With the rWFD controversy, we've been concentrating on council-offered kerbside waste services, but there's another form of collection authorities are often forced into providing: the clean-up of fly-tipped waste. **Will Simpson** finds out the best way to tackle the problem

CONTEXT

Dealing with fly-tipping pests

It has long been, and continues to be, a blight on our countryside, our towns and cities. Fly-tipping is one of those perennial problems that it seems will always be with us. For as long as our economic system produces waste, there will be unscrupulous individuals who think that it's acceptable to dump theirs on other people's land.

It's a problem that just isn't going away. According to Defra, in 2010/11 there were over 820,000 reported incidences of fly-tipping in the UK, and though that's a 13.5 per cent decrease from the previous year, it still constitutes a considerable problem, the burden of which falls largely on local government. (Fly-tipping on

private land is rare, but The National Farmers' Union claims that figures are up, with 168 instances between June 2011 and May 2012. This is a 45 per cent increase from the previous year, and cost the landowners £170 on

that alternate weekly waste collections are leading to a rise in fly-tipping. In fact, instances of household black bags being dumped have declined from over 300,000 in 2007/08 to less than 200,000 last year.

your door and say 'I can see that you're having some work done. If you pay me £50 I can dispose of the waste properly for you.' And then they just drive it to a suitable location and dump it."

The primary legislation covering fly-tipping is the 1990 Environmental Protection Act, which makes it illegal to dump waste on any piece of land that does not have a waste management licence. This was amended slightly by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act of 2005, which increased penalties for anyone convicted of fly-tipping. Enforcement of the act is the responsibility of local authorities, although the Environment Agency (EA) tackles the more prominent cases of, say, the dumping of hazardous chemicals.

The EA takes an intelligence-based approach to waste crime and works with the National Environmental Crime Team, a body staffed with ex police officers. A recent case where hazardous chemical waste was found in roadside lay-bys in Lancashire, Yorkshire and Shropshire is typical of their workload. In this instance, a national investigation,

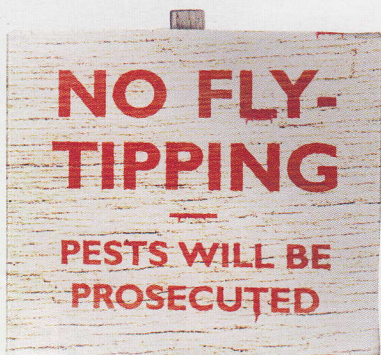
“It's all very well a single council saying that they're going to address fly-tipping, but that tends not to work without working with the police and neighbouring councils”

average to clean up.) Some £40 million is spent each year by UK local authorities to clean up instances on public land, including the so called 'hidden' costs of administering systems to combat it.

So who's responsible for it? Well, 63 per cent of fly-tipping incidents in 2010/11 were classified as household waste, though interestingly (and contrary to some tabloid reports), there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest

A large proportion of that total figure is commercial waste. "It's more from your more cowboy end of the market", suggests Sam Harding, Campaign Manager at the Campaign to Protect Rural England. "It's smaller builders choosing to dump the waste either so that they don't have to pay the landfill tax or to avoid having to pay more to deal with the safe disposal of toxic materials.

"Then there's also people who will almost knock on





Operation Pandora, was launched that led to the successful prosecution of three men and one woman in April this year.

But by and large, for smaller-scale fly-tipping, enforcement falls upon local authorities. In recent years, a number have come up with intriguing new initiatives to tackle the problem.

Boston Borough Council in Lincolnshire is one such authority. Last autumn it launched Operation Fly Swat, a multi-agency project that involves the EA, neighbouring councils and local prison North Sea Camp, whose prisoners form the Fly Swat clean-up team. Working on the project is seen as a way to rehabilitate prisoners and ease them back into the community, and it's an approach that has won much praise. In its first six months, Operation Fly Swat cleared more than 100 tonnes of illegally dumped waste.

Meanwhile, Kent County Council has spearheaded the Clean Kent Partnership. Again, this is a multi-council project that includes the local district councils, the Environment Agency and local police, and includes an education campaign in local schools as well as leafleting at local builders' merchants. The results have certainly been impressive – since the initiative launched in 2004, Kent has seen a whopping 67 per cent drop in reported fly-tipping incidents.

What both projects have in common is that they involve a number of stakeholders, including neighbouring authorities. After all, there's no use putting in place steps to tackle fly-tipping hotspots if by doing so you just move them over the council border. "The key thing with addressing fly-tipping is partnership", insists a spokesperson for the Local Government Association. "It's all very well a single

council saying that they're going to address it, but that tends not to work without working with the police and neighbouring councils.

All councils should be in those kinds of partnerships, looking to share intelligence, their information and best practice as to how they approach it, how they conduct the clean up and who they get involved in the clean up."

On a national level, a concerted attempt is being made to tackle the problem. In July, Lord Taylor held a one-day fly-tipping summit with representatives from local authorities, Defra, the EA and the Campaign to Protect Rural England, which discussed possible routes forward. Some of the proposals made included introducing fixed penalty notices of between £300 and £500 for fly-tipping – the idea being that this would be cheaper on the public purse than pursuing offenders through the courts, and might well be a more effective deterrent as well.

Other than that, there was no suggestion by any parties that further significant changes in the law are required. (Having said that, policy makers in England and Wales might be advised to keep their eyes on what is happening in Northern Ireland. Over there, the law is in the process of being changed so that local councils will have the same authority

as the Department of the Environment to prosecute larger cases of illegal waste dumping. Eleven pilot schemes are currently running that will report their findings on this legal change back to the Northern Irish government in 2013).

But the main initiative to emerge from the Taylor summit was the launch of a consultation on a proposed Fly-tipping Partnership Framework. A Defra spokesperson said that the department hopes that the framework will "bring together best practice and options for preventing, reporting, investigating and clearing fly-tipped waste". He also added that Defra is looking to support "some local authorities to work with landowners and managers and other groups to pilot innovative ways of dealing with fly-tipping that best suit their local circumstances".

Even those committed to combating fly-tipping admit that it will probably always be there: "It's not something that will ever be entirely solved", says Sam Harding. "Though that doesn't mean to say we shouldn't try to reduce it as much as we can." But if the new partnership framework can work the same magic on a national level that the Kent and Boston initiatives have locally, then at least the financial burden it imposes on local government across the UK might be reduced.