

Local Environmental Quality in Times of Austerity

**Prioritisation &
Behaviour Change**

Implications and Executive Summary

a London Councils & Keep Britain Tidy research project

JULY 2011



About Keep Britain Tidy

Keep Britain Tidy is an environmental charity working to achieve cleaner, greener places for everyone. We campaign in England against litter and neglect, providing advice and leading others by inspiring practical action and better policy. With our origins in the 1950s anti-litter campaigns, we now focus on the range of issues affecting where people live including fly-tipping, fly-posting, graffiti, anti-social behaviour and abandoned vehicles. We run programmes such as Eco-Schools, Blue Flag and Quality Coast Awards for beaches, and the Green Flag for parks to demonstrate practical action. We are part funded through Government and other income is secured through training, consultancy and sponsorship. For more information on how you can make a change visit www.keepbritaintidy.org

About London Councils

London Councils is committed to fighting for more resources for London and getting the best possible deal for London's 33 councils. We develop policy, lobby government and others, and run a range of services designed to make life better for Londoners. For more information visit www.londoncouncils.gov.uk

Prepared for London Councils and Keep Britain Tidy by Keep Britain Tidy's Evidence and Research Team

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For further information on the work of Keep Britain Tidy and London Councils, please contact us at:

Keep Britain Tidy
Elizabeth House
The Pier
Wigan WN3 4EX
Tel: 01942 612621
Fax: 01942 824778

www.keepbritaintidy.org

London Councils
59½ Southwark Street
London SE1 0AL
Tel. 020 7934 9999
www.londoncouncils.gov.uk

Implications

Conclusions

The journey to prioritisation: we have evidence, collected qualitatively, to suggest that street cleaning and community safety are a significant driver of dissatisfaction when standards slip or services are cut.

Factors affecting the likelihood to get involved: Residents will more often than not be looking for activities that are already underway and that have a clearly localised focus. There was some evidence to suggest that awareness of funding cuts was inspiring a desire to get more involved but this was minimal and depended on a number of factors.

Attitudes towards enforcement (fines): The majority of those consulted for this research agreed that fixed penalty notices (FPNs) were most effective as a preventative measure *after the fact*.

More carrot? Techniques used to draw people towards more positive behaviours were queried on the basis that they didn't always come with a promise of loyalty to the new behaviour they encouraged. It was for this reason that education was the preferred technique overall.

Recommendations

1. Appreciate that factors leading to dissatisfaction do not always correlate with what drives satisfaction.
2. To ensure you are focusing on the right things – ask 'do local perceptions meet with local realities'?
3. Be aware that not all behaviour change techniques sustain loyalty to the new behaviour.
4. Enforcement must be considered proportionate to the issue, consistent and transparent.
5. Opportunities for engagement should be 'patch' specific and incremental.

Executive summary

Local environmental quality (LEQ) comprises all those environmental issues that are readily sensible to most of us as we go about our everyday lives. For the most part these are visible, mainly physical, issues, which also (directly or indirectly) affect the quality of our lives. LEQ and related anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues can encompass anything from litter to dog fouling to young people hanging around on the streets.

In times of austerity, when cuts to local government funding appear almost daily in the news headlines, how do residents of London prioritise public services? And, are these priorities changing in the face of this increasingly challenging financial climate?

This research, co-funded by London Councils and Keep Britain Tidy, considers London residents' priorities for spend in these times of austerity. In particular, this research explores where local environmental quality (LEQ) and related anti-social behaviour issues feature in this list of priorities.

The research looks at how changing resident priorities on public sector spend impact on the ways in which Londoners would like authority bodies to address local environmental quality. Putting the residents in charge of their own 'budgets', the research explores: the degree to which residents see fines for local environmental quality and related anti-social behaviour offences as an acceptable source of revenue; what residents are willing to contribute towards the issues personally (time, for example); and what other approaches and techniques are most likely to change poor environmental behaviours and encourage people to 'do the right thing'.

While the research mainly focuses on the results of five focus groups conducted with residents from across Greater London, our findings are complemented by a short series of quantitative queries included on a regularly conducted London-wide online survey and is contextualised by our existing knowledge.

Prioritising services & local environmental quality issues

Residents were asked to allocate a budget over ten services (loosely modelled on how their current council tax is distributed) so we could determine how residents

prioritise street cleaning and community safety. Put in charge of London's local government budget for six months, they were simply asked, "How will you spend it?"

- Residents told us street cleaning in particular was "essential".
- Street cleaning and community safety are 'hygiene factors':
 - When performing well they are taken for granted and do not drive resident satisfaction;
 - When standards slip or the service is cut it will significantly drive resident dissatisfaction.
- To this end, 59% of Londoners think that stopping street cleaning services in their local area would lead to an increase in anti-social behaviour, while 53% believe that property prices might fall and 51% think that residents might feel less safe. Only 9% of Londoners felt that there would be no immediate consequences if local street cleaning services were stopped.
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 - When performing well they are taken for granted and do not drive resident satisfaction;
 - When standards slip or the service is cut it will significantly drive resident dissatisfaction.
- Looking at average spend across the focus groups, street cleaning and community safety were the 8th and 9th priorities, out of ten services respectively, overall.

Given the opportunity to offer a 'helping hand' to each of the services, residents were most likely to assist in education based initiatives but the desire to help did not impact on how they prioritised spend – London residents argued that anything they could do to help out was simply no substitute for the 'real thing'.

The application of 'helping hands' to specific services was usually driven by one or more of five factors:

- **Ability & Confidence** – residents with special skills and the confidence to apply them to specific activities.
- **Funding Proxy** – there was some evidence that a minority of residents with the skills and confidence would be prepared to step in to help where funding had already been cut to specific services.
- **Momentum Motivator** – residents are much more likely to get involved in activity that is already underway and much less likely to initiate activity themselves.

- **‘Patch’ Proximity** – residents are much more likely to engage in localised activities.
- **Activity Alignment** – if residents can align engagement with current interests and activities they will be much more likely to get involved.

Residents were then asked to disseminate their budget over twelve local environmental quality (LEQ) issues. People using or dealing drugs in public places and young people hanging around on the street emerged as the top two priority issues, while graffiti was given the lowest priority.

- Prioritisation tended to be led by the residents’ proximity to the issues – in other words, prioritisation was largely driven by personal experience of the issues.
- The frequency of an issue is an important part of how residents determine what LEQ issues are a priority in their area. For example, although fly-tipping was considered one of the most serious enviro-crimes it only was only ranked sixth in the list of LEQ priorities as it was an issue that the majority of the respondents had not directly come across that often.
- Following the *‘what’s on my patch’* instinct described above, residents would be guided by causation or the *‘knock-on effect’* – looking at where they could tackle the ‘smaller’ issues by prioritising the ‘bigger’ ones (for instance, rightly or wrongly some thought they could tackle litter and graffiti by dealing with young people hanging around in public places).
- With some issues, such as fast food litter, prioritisation was as much about getting businesses to take responsibility for the issue as it was about tackling the issue directly.
- Street urination was fairly low down on London residents’ priorities for spend, with the majority of residents agreeing that urination was somewhat inevitable and that the provision of more public toilets would be the only real solution to the issue.

The application of ‘helping hands’ to specific issues was frequently issue-specific, with some of the LEQ challenges simply considered too ‘dirty’ or too dangerous to tackle hands-on. Additional factors included:

- **‘Patch’ specific** – offers to help were frequently only valid in the residents’ local area usually due to personalised motivations or, in a broad sense, a positive experience of community spirit at this level.

- **‘Help’ incrementally defined** – Some saw intervention or a willingness to intervene (and challenge poor behaviour) as a kind of engagement, while others considered reporting issues to the authorities to be ‘help’. With this in mind, ‘action’ was actually a contentious term – for some, not contributing to the problems (not littering or participating in anti-social behaviour) was positive action. For others this kind of passive activity didn’t do enough to solve the issues long term.
- **Beliefs around responsibility** – debate on ‘helping hands’ centred on the respondents’ beliefs and ideals concerning *who* is actually ‘responsible’ for dealing with the issues. Perceptions as to who should be responsible varied from those who contribute to the problems (e.g. litterers) to the businesses that supply the materials that are littered (e.g. fast food outlets). However, there was no clear correlation between residents assigning help to issues on this basis.

Enforcement & other behaviour change techniques

‘Enforcement’ in this context refers to the use of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) or fine.¹ Enforcement is the behaviour change technique residents of London most readily applied to LEQ and related anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues overall, but fixed penalty notices (FPNs) were not always considered proportionate or appropriate to environmental offences.

- For issues such as cigarette-related litter FPNs can be considered a disproportionately excessive response. This is compounded when residents feel as though their environment limits their choices and encourages poor or bad behaviour i.e. no litter bins or public ashtrays.
- For other issues, like fly-tipping or drugs-related littering, FPNs were simply not considered tough enough. Fly-tipping in particular was seen as a very serious enviro-crime and residents were unanimously comfortable with significant fines for this offence.
- Dog fouling was the issue that garnered the most emotional support from residents, with a significant number agreeing that fines were an appropriate

¹ Fixed penalty notices (FPNs) can provide enforcement agencies with a way to deal with low-level environmental crimes (like dog fouling, littering and graffiti). FPNs may be issued when an enforcing officer believes that an offence has been committed and give the offender an opportunity to avoid prosecution by payment of a penalty which is, on average around £75 but that varies according to the offence. FPNs can be issued by anyone with delegated power from the local authority. This list can and does include Police, Police Community Support Officers, LA enforcement officers, neighbourhood wardens, dog wardens and some Parish Council officers.

measure and many respondents indicating that an increase in the amount offenders are expected to pay would be acceptable.

The perceived limitations of FPNs challenge their effectiveness as a behaviour change tool and, for many, these limitations make them preventative only *after* an individual or someone very close to them has been issued with one. The perceived limitations of FPNs include:

- The perceived threat of being caught in the act is considered minimal.
- Awareness of financial and resource cuts lead residents to believe that the risk of being caught is even lower – the inevitable impact of fewer authority representatives on the streets.
 - 84% of Londoners think its likely (very or fairly) that there will be no consequences for dropping litter in a public place while around three quarters (76%) think it is unlikely someone would be given a fine for the same offence.
- Finally, the ability for authorities to ensure that the offender provides them with their correct personal details was perceived to be limited, if not impossible in some cases.

Moving from tackling environmental offences to encouraging more pro-environmental behaviours in residents, **education** was deemed to be the most effective, long-term tool overall. Other approaches to behaviour change were discussed and the following summarises our findings.

‘Education’

- Considered the most effective approach for long-term change.
- The majority of respondents agreed that education was most effective when undertaken with young people.
- Preference for educational messages to be localised and to visualise impact of poor behaviour (e.g. how many football fields could you fill with the litter you collect?).

‘Incentives’

- Incentives were only thought to bring short-term change and low levels of loyalty to the new behaviour.

- Incentives were considered more appropriate for young people with some respondents questioning why you would reward positive behaviours in those who should already be behaving in this way.
- Many asked if incentives were actually affordable in the current financial climate.
- Consensus that incentives or rewards were more suited to organised and structured engagement activities rather than ad hoc contributions.
- Incentives might be better suited to corporate or private sector organisations as opposed to public sector bodies.

‘Nudges’

- The theory that explores how we make choices and how environments and situations can be developed to ‘nudge’ people in to making better decisions for themselves was well received in the context of making behaviours more fun.
- However, there was some concern that it does very little to change the values and attitudes that underpin behaviours.

‘Campaigns’

- Obviously closely related to educational approach but there was a general agreement that campaigns will only be as effective as they are good and of a certain quality.
- Coverage was considered important – residents agreed that they needed to see campaigns regularly in order for them to be effective.
- Having someone high profile to spread the message was preferred.

