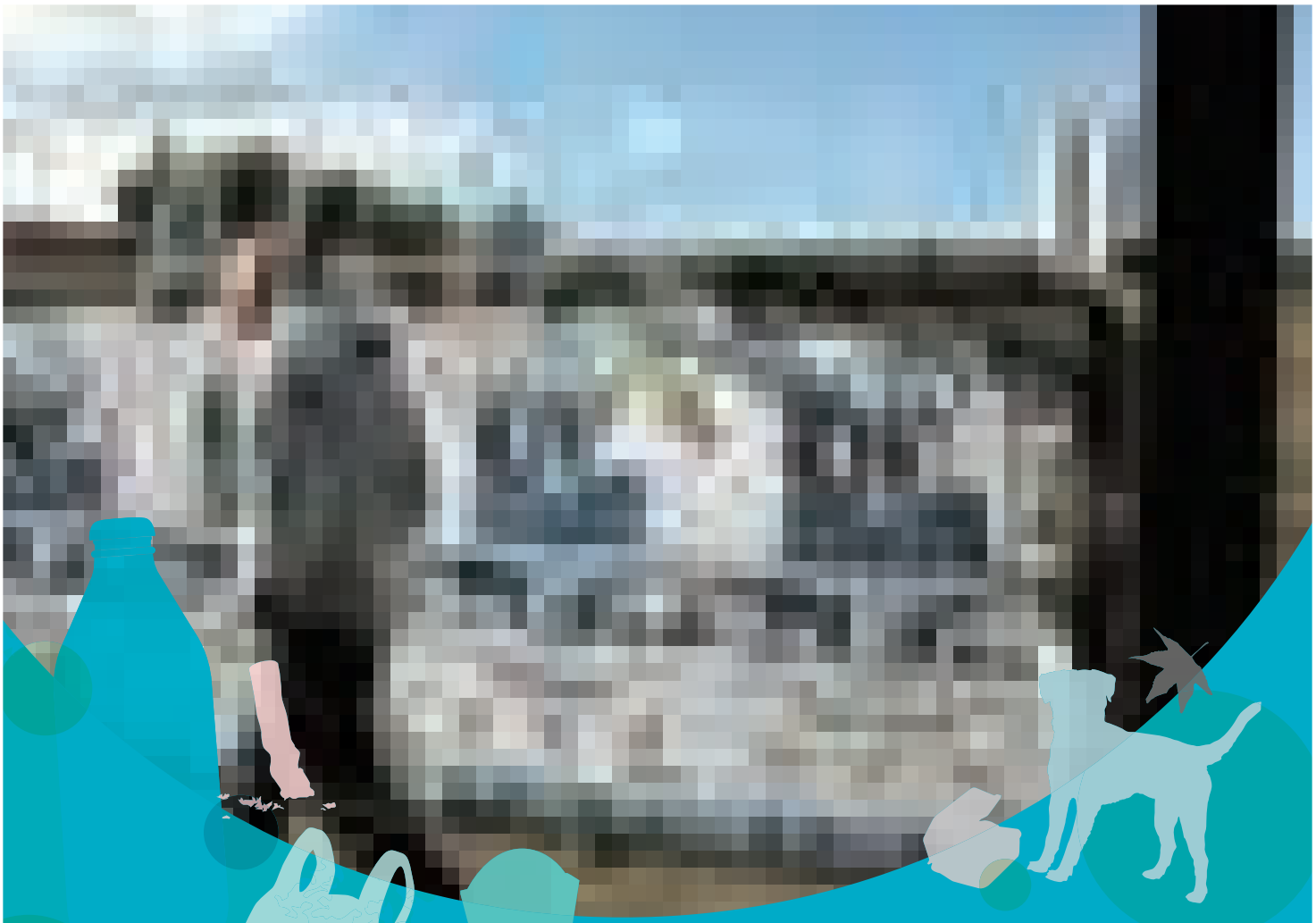


THE VIEW FROM **THE STREET**

Local environment:
public perceptions
vs. reality

2012

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY

Background

Keep Britain Tidy regularly conducts research into the public's perception of the places where they live, work and visit. This knowledge provides us with a greater understanding of how people really feel about these places. By identifying and understanding perceptions, we can change people's attitudes and behaviours and bring about lasting improvements to our local and global environments.

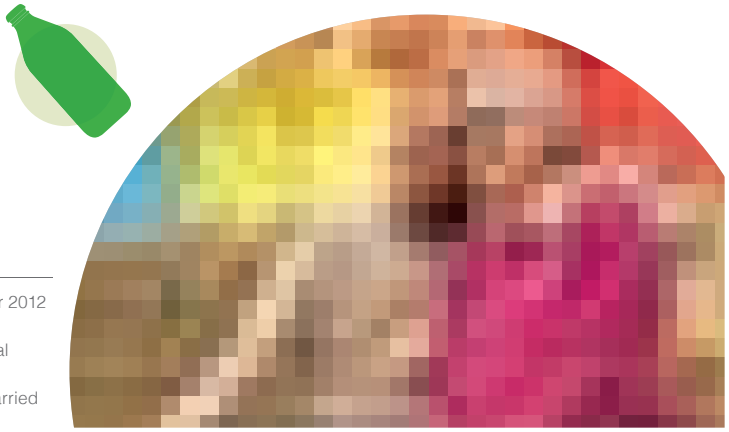
Following on from similar research projects in previous years, Keep Britain Tidy has conducted a national survey[1] to track the general public's perceptions of their local environment, as well as their attitudes towards and behaviours in the places where they live.

The quality of our local areas can impact on health and wellbeing, crime rates, levels of anti-social behaviour and the vibrancy of the local economy[2]. Understanding people's perceptions of the quality of their local areas and what they believe or perceive to be the problems is a very important factor in creating spaces that everyone can enjoy.

From our experience, people's perceptions can often differ from reality. Understanding both perceptions of the local area and the reality of the situation can be extremely powerful and can help to focus activity and prioritise improvements. Every year, Keep Britain Tidy carries out the Local Environmental Quality Survey of England (LEQSE)[3]. The survey measures standards of cleanliness and reflects the things people see in their local area that have an impact on the quality of the local environment. Keep Britain Tidy wanted to use these two datasets together to compare the perception of local areas with the reality to provide a true 'state of the nation'.

In today's tough economic climate, local authority spending cuts are no secret. Councils are working hard to save money without it having a detrimental effect on the local community. This includes trying to reduce and manage the demand for local services.

As the leading voice on local environmental quality, Keep Britain Tidy wanted to understand more about the effects spending cuts could be having on local services and the public's perception of their local communities. What is more, we wanted to learn about the spending cuts and how they were affecting local authorities and their ability to provide front-line services within their communities. As such, we have also surveyed[4] a sample of local authorities in England in order to gain a fuller picture of current viewpoints and perspectives. This report outlines the findings and makes comparisons to similar datasets from previous years, where appropriate.

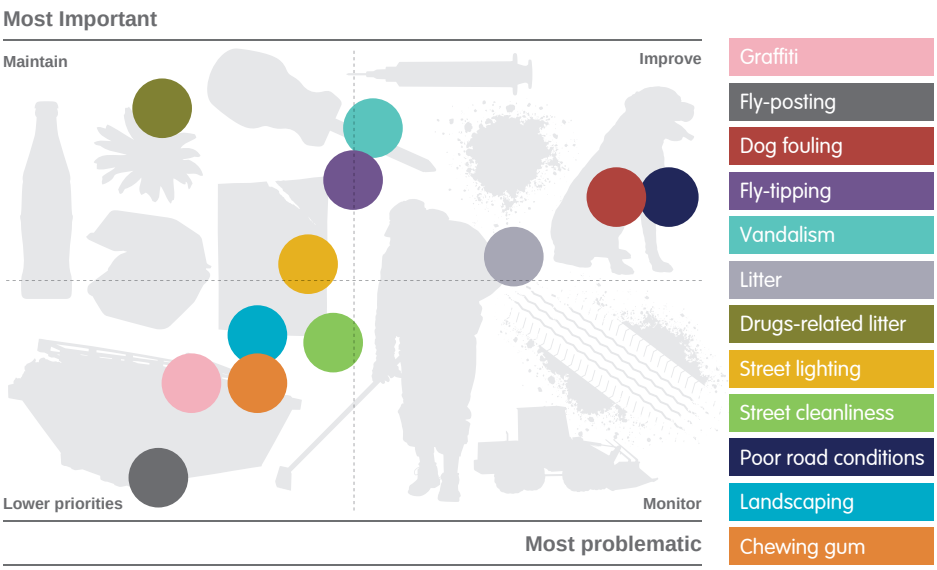


1 National Perceptions Survey, undertaken by Toluna with 1000 adults in England, October 2012
2 Little Book of Litter, Keep Britain Tidy, 2012
3 This year the survey was carried out between April 2011 and March 2012, covering a total of 10,725 sites in 54 local authority areas
4 Local Authority Perspective: Issues Affecting the Quality of our Local Environments, carried out via Toluna QuickSurveys with 32 local authorities in England, October 2012

People and their places

In order to identify residents' priorities for their local environments, we provided members of the public with a list of issues. We then asked them to rate each one in terms of how important they thought it would be to address the issue if it was found to be present in their area and how problematic, if at all, the issue was in their area. The average scores for each issue are plotted on the priority map as shown.

Issues affecting our local communities



> "Roads are covered with pot holes"

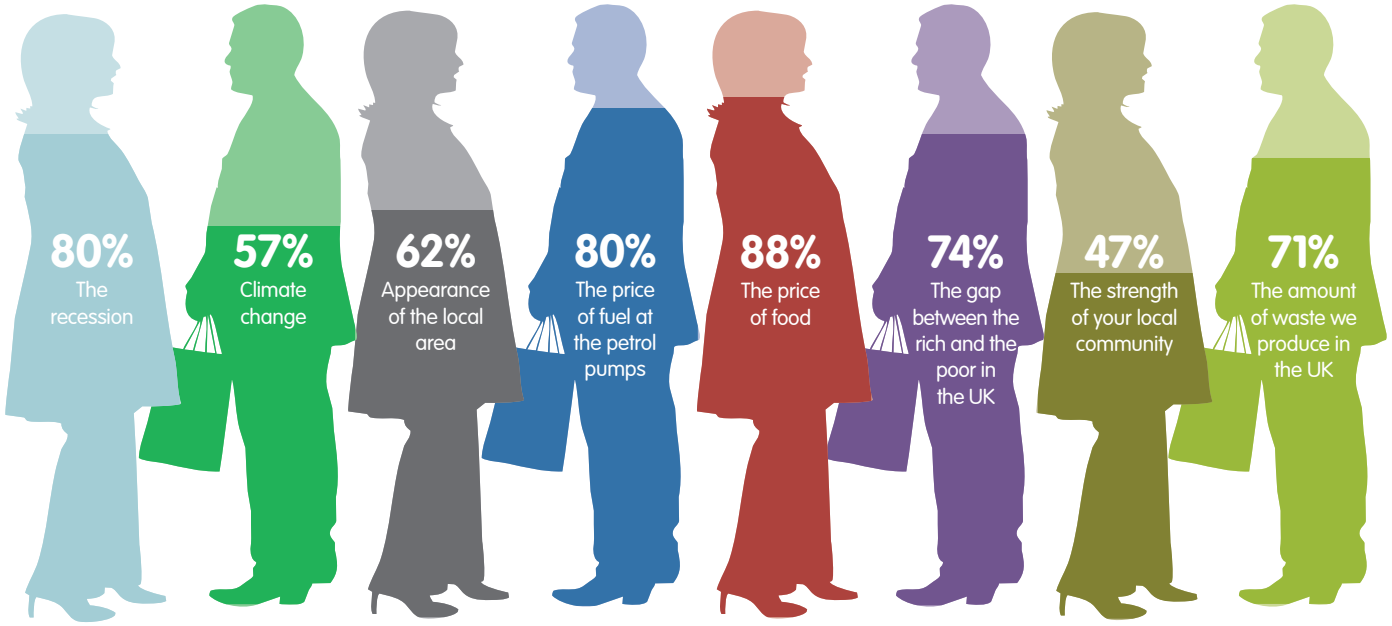
The results are very similar to those obtained in both the 2009 and 2010 national perceptions surveys. Poor road conditions, dog fouling and litter remain the public's top three priorities for improvement. Interestingly, the LEQSE results show that dog fouling only impacts upon a small percentage of sites surveyed across England. However, our research[5] suggests that the associated health risks with dog fouling and the fact that it is perceived as dirty and unacceptable makes this a big issue for the general public.

Looking at the results in relation to each other, we can see that fly-posting and graffiti are considered to be among the least important and least problematic issues affecting local communities. This perception corresponds with the LEQSE results, which this year reported that both fly-posting and graffiti were not a widespread problem. Chewing gum, landscaping maintenance, street cleanliness and street lighting also fell into this lower priority section. Interestingly, although a lower priority, in reality there was a problem with levels of detritus, (such as natural grit, sand and soil). This is a direct measure of street cleanliness, highlighted in the national 'on the ground' survey, with 39% of sites surveyed falling below an acceptable standard for detritus. Chewing gum contributes to staining and staining was also raised as an issue on the ground, with 20% of sites falling below an acceptable standard.

In comparison, litter, dog fouling and poor road conditions were areas that people felt needed improvement. Poor road conditions can be closely linked with street cleanliness. High levels of detritus can cause damage to road surfaces and often large accumulations instigate weed growth, which can then also begin to damage road surfaces. Litter, although not as much of an issue on the ground as detritus and staining, is something the public feel strongly about, and with 18% of sites falling below an acceptable standard, litter is a priority.

5 The Effectiveness of Enforcement on Behaviour Change, Keep Britain Tidy, 2011

People's concerns



We also asked people how concerned, if at all, they were about a number of issues affecting our local and global environments.

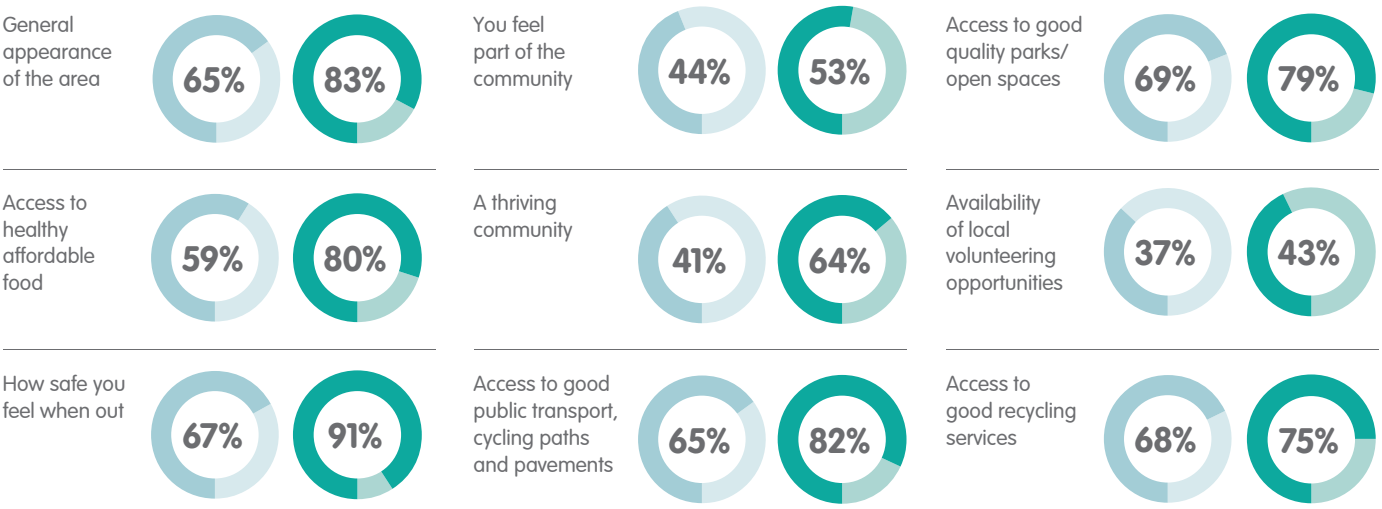
The price of food, the recession and the price of fuel were the greatest concerns for the public with at least 8 in 10 people stating that they are very or fairly concerned about these issues.

As the price of food[6] and fuel[7] goes up/has gone up perceptions of these issues have also risen. Our survey reveals that the price of food is the issue that is of most concern to the public. More people have become concerned about economic issues than in previous surveys and these are now overshadowing concerns about our local areas. However, a similar proportion of the public are concerned about the appearance of their local area in 2012 as they were in 2009 (63%) and these figures are just slightly lower than the proportion that were concerned in 2010 (70%), when concerns about the appearance of their local area peaked.

We were also interested to learn about people's perceptions of other issues that may be affecting their neighbourhood and local community.

6 Severe droughts drive food prices higher threatening the poor, The World Bank, 2012
7 Fuel Price Report, The AA, 2012

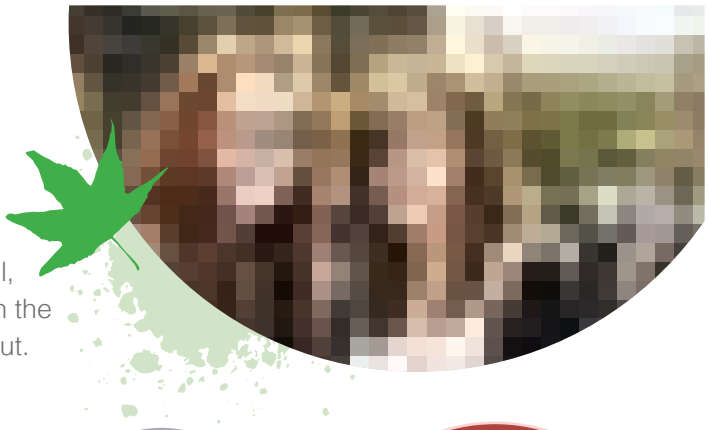
Neighbourhood issues



People's outdoor safety in their community was rated as the most important issue (91%). This was followed by the general appearance of the area (83%), access to good public transport, cycling paths and pavements (82%), access to healthy affordable food (80%) and access to good quality parks and open spaces (79%). This shows that even within the current economic situation, the general public remain concerned about the appearance of their local area.

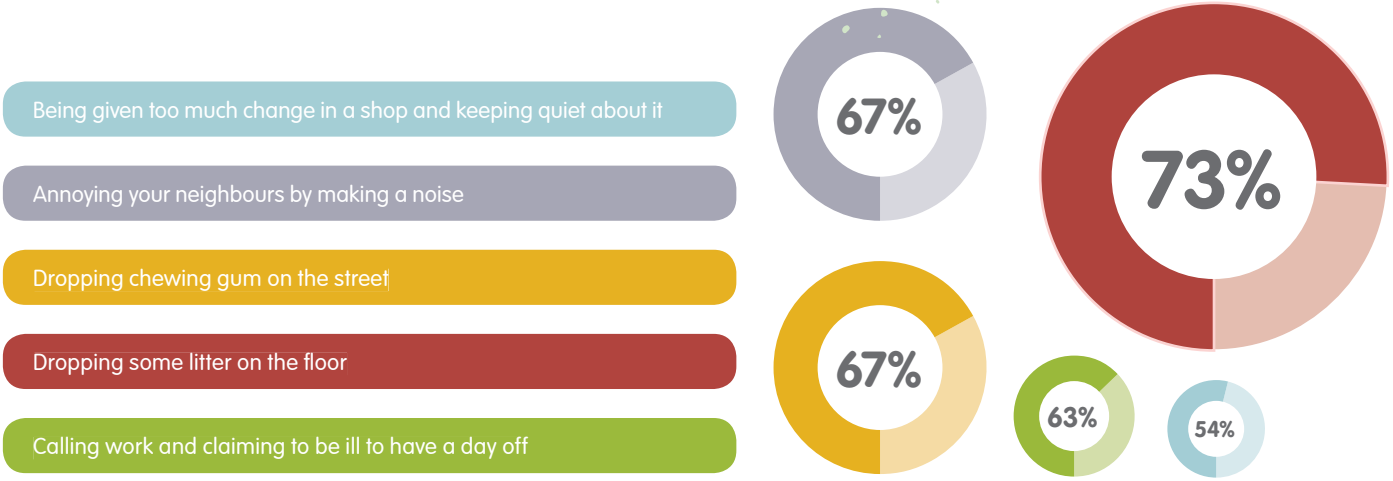
However, when asked to rate how satisfied people were with the issues in their local area, a number of gaps between importance of the issue and satisfaction with the issue emerged. The largest gaps were how safe people felt when outdoors, that people live in a thriving local community, they have access to healthy affordable food, the general appearance of their local area and people have access to good public transport, cycling paths and pavements.

Those aged 65 or over were significantly more likely to say that feeling part of the community was extremely important when compared with all other age groups



Levels of guilt

We also wanted to understand more about how guilty, if at all, people feel about dropping litter, but we wanted to set that in the context of other behaviours that people might feel guilty about.



Women are significantly more likely than men to feel guilty about dropping litter

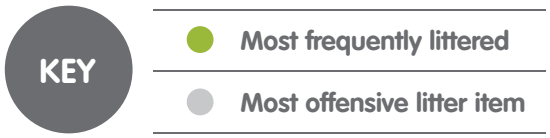
Dropping litter was the activity that elicited the most guilt with 73% of people nationally saying that they would feel guilty for dropping litter on the street. These results are similar to those obtained in both 2009 and 2010, where around seven in 10 people stated that they would feel guilty for dropping litter. The results reveal that more people would feel guilty about dropping litter than being given too much change in a shop and keeping quiet about it and calling work and claiming to be ill to have a day off.

It is interesting that a much greater proportion of people would feel guilty about dropping litter than being given too much change in a shop and keeping quiet about it. This could be because there is now an increased proportion of large corporations supplying goods in our local areas compared with smaller local businesses and there is possibly a lack of a personal relationship with the people they are buying products from. Alternatively this could be linked to the current economic climate, where household budgets are becoming increasingly tighter and people may be more concerned about the amount of the money they have.

Litter

We gave people a list of different litter items and asked them to tell us which they thought was the most frequently littered item and which one they found the most offensive litter item.

Most frequently littered and most offensive litter items



Fast food litter, smokers' materials, such as cigarette butts and packets, and dog fouling on the street were perceived to be the most frequently littered items. Men were significantly more likely than women to state that fast food litter was the litter type that they identified on the street.

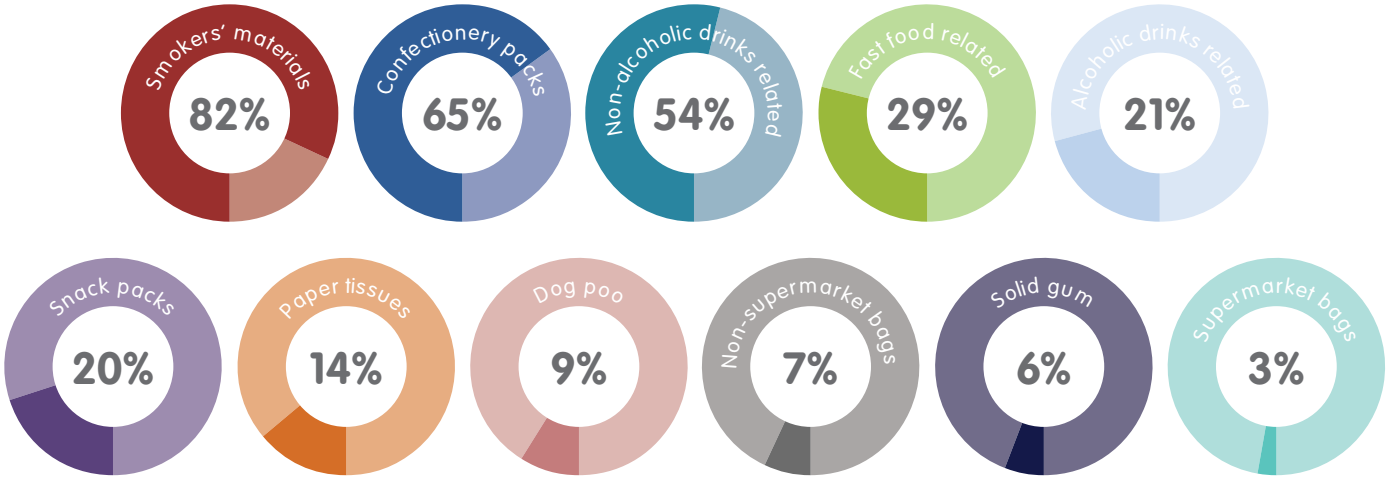
Dog fouling was noted by around a fifth of people (17%) to be the most frequently found litter item on the streets and almost two-thirds of people (64%) felt that it was the most offensive litter item. Our previous research[8] highlights that people perceive dog fouling as dirty and unacceptable and are concerned about the health risks associated with it, in particular the risks to young children in parks and open spaces.

Alcohol cans/bottles was perceived to be the most offensive litter item, by around a tenth of people in England (11%).

People have a guilty conscience about dropping litter

8 Litter Segmentation, Keep Britain Tidy, 2006 and Local Environmental Quality in Times of Austerity, Keep Britain Tidy in partnership with London Councils, 2011.

Percentage of sites affected by litter types



The perceptions that fast food litter and smokers' materials are the most frequently littered items do align with the 'reality' of the issues (from the 'on the ground' data). Smokers' materials, such as cigarette butts and packets, are the litter type that is most commonly found on our streets and public spaces. This is the most problematic litter type. While smokers' materials were regarded as one of the most frequently littered items, our research found that people do not really find them offensive. Our existing research[9] shows that cigarette litter can often be a contentious issue, particularly among smokers who protest that there aren't enough cigarette bins.

9 Local Environmental Quality in Times of Austerity, Keep Britain Tidy in partnership with London Councils, 2011

Fast food litter was most prevalent on rural roads and main roads

According to the LEQSE data, fast food litter is less of a problem on the ground than confectionery packs and non-alcoholic drinks-related litter, but people perceived fast food litter to be more frequently littered than these items. This year's LEQSE results showed fast food was the litter type that has seen the largest increase over the past 12 months, rising by 6% from 23% of sites being affected in 2010/11 to 29% of sites in 2011/12. Levels of fast food litter have been on the increase since 2008/09 and more than 3,000 of the sites surveyed were affected by the packaging associated with the fast food industry. The amount of sites affected by fast food litter is now at its highest level since LEQSE first measured it in 2004/05.

Fast food litter was most prevalent on rural roads appearing on 45% of rural roads surveyed. This was closely followed by main roads 39% of main roads were affected by the presence of fast food litter. In addition, the proportion of both of these land uses affected by fast food litter has increased since last year's survey. These findings indicate that it is highly likely that the fast food items would have been purchased elsewhere and that the litter has travelled to the point it was found, either by foot or by car. With this in mind, we wanted to understand more about motorists' perceptions of roadside litter and so we commissioned a survey to explore their views.

Our survey[10] revealed that 50% of motorists noticed litter at the roadside more than they did a year ago and a fifth of motorists (21%) said that they regularly see people throwing litter from vehicles, with a further two-thirds (65%) saying that they occasionally see people throwing litter from vehicles – that's a huge 86% of people who have witnessed vehicle littering. The items that they typically witness being thrown from vehicles include smokers' materials (53% of motorists said that cigarette butts and packets were the most commonly littered items from vehicles), confectionery packs, such as sweet wrappers and chocolate bar wrappers (noted by 20% as the most prevalent litter type thrown from vehicles) and fast food litter (cited by 16%). These are important findings from the research and are clearly issues that need to be addressed.

"People just don't seem to clean up after their dogs"

While not a widespread issue in reality, dog fouling was noted by around a fifth of people to be the most frequently found litter item on the streets and was the litter item they found most offensive. After a decade that saw a decline in the number of places affected by dog fouling, this year's LEQSE report shows a worrying two per cent increase. One in 11 sites surveyed is now found to have dog fouling present. Keep Britain Tidy also carried out a snapshot study with 32 local authorities and asked them about dog fouling in their local areas. From this we learnt that, on average, local authorities received 213 complaints during 2011/12, with some receiving none, but some receiving as many as 1,800 complaints.

Two-thirds of people (64%) felt that dog poo was the most offensive litter item

Due to the extent to which dog fouling is of concern to members of the public, Keep Britain Tidy would suggest that it is a priority for action in terms of both service delivery and addressing perceptions. Local authorities were also asked, apart from the actual removal/cleansing of dog fouling, what other approaches they take to tackle dog fouling. It is important to understand what is being put in place to encourage dog owners to pick up after their dogs.

The results showed that local authorities are implementing a range of approaches to tackle dog fouling within local communities.

10 Motorists Perceptions Survey, undertaken by Toluna with 500 motorists in England, October 2012.

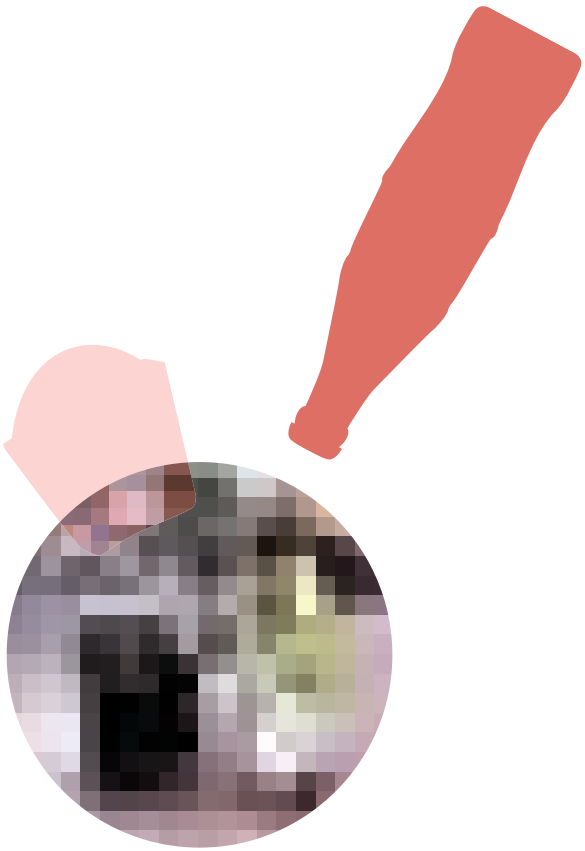
Approaches used by local authorities to tackle dog fouling

The results above show that although in 'reality' dog fouling is only found on a small number of sites throughout England, local authorities place considerable effort to tackle the issues. This is likely to be as a result of the fact that dog fouling is not only unsightly, but also dangerous to health.

In general, the spread of the findings indicates that local authorities do not rely on any single approach to tackling dog fouling. A comprehensive dog fouling strategy is likely to include a combination of approaches, including enforcement, education and community engagement.

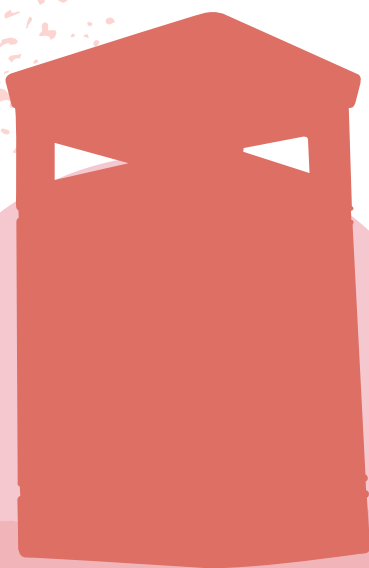
91% of local authorities use enforcement warning notices, which suggests that the general thinking is that the threat of enforcement activity acts as an incentive to reduce dog fouling on the streets. Interestingly, the survey results also show a high use of promotion and campaign activity, ranging from behaviour change activity (69%) to the use of the media through press releases (47%). This seems to suggest a recognition that enforcement and remediation can only go so far and that reducing dog fouling at source by engaging directly with local communities is essential.

Our research with members of the public showed that three quarters of people (74%) think it is the job of local authorities to persuade people to change their behaviour and stop dropping litter. Two fifths (39%) think the responsibility falls with Keep Britain Tidy and around a third (31%) think that those who produce items/goods that could end up as litter are responsible for behaviour change activity.



Bins

This year, our 'on the ground' survey looked at the condition of more than 3,000 bins. Not one of them was considered to be completely clean, although 79% had only small amounts of dirt and grime on them. The reason this gives cause for concern is because we know from our existing research[11] that members of the public can be put off from using a bin if they consider it to be dirty and therefore may lead them to drop litter. Our survey with members of the public shows that around a third of people (35%) will be deterred from using a litter bin if it is dirty and/or damaged.



11 Litter Segmentation, Keep Britain Tidy, 2006

Street cleansing and grounds maintenance

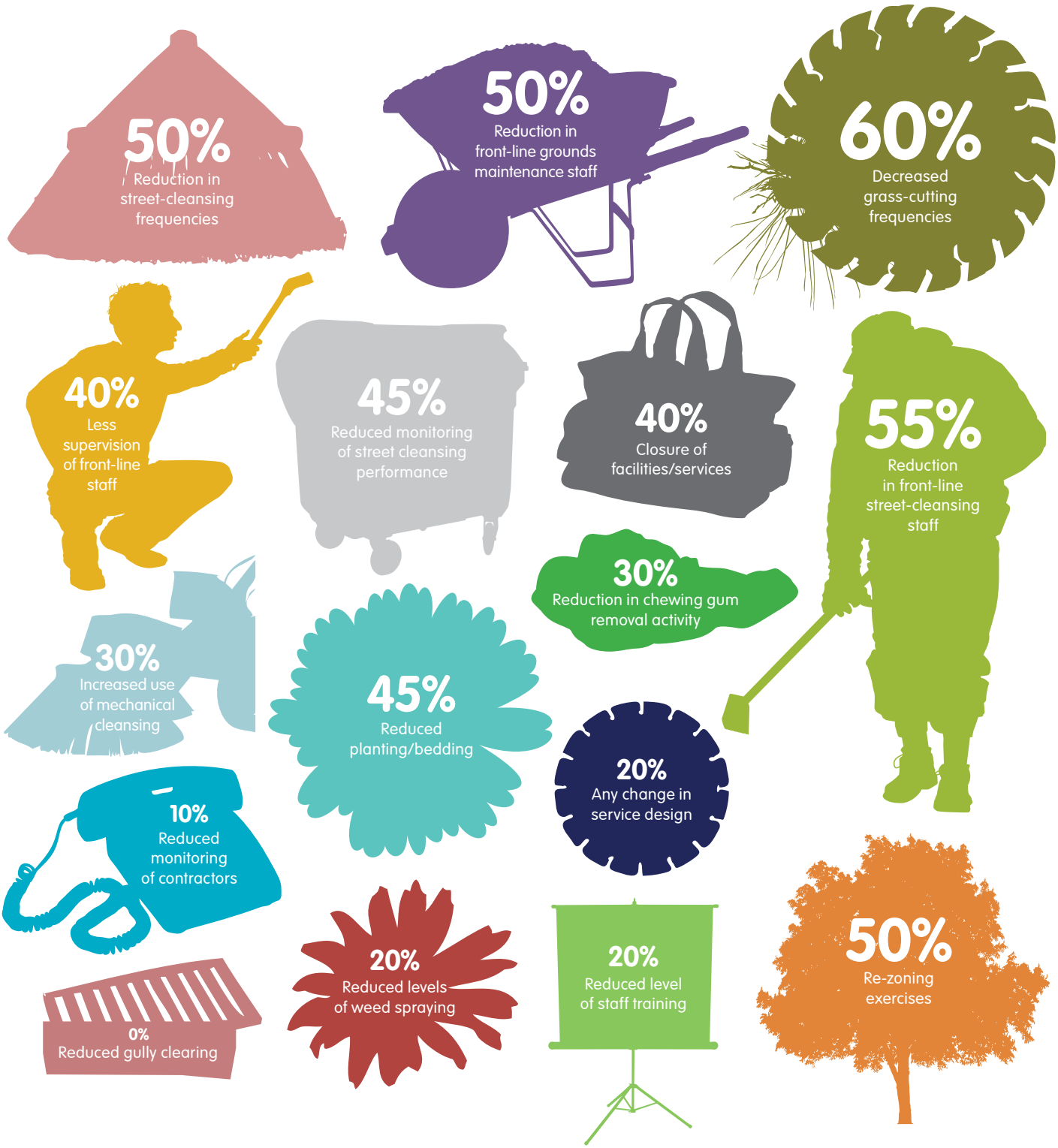
Our 'on the ground' data for 2011/12 highlights that there are areas in England where levels of litter, detritus, weed growth and staining are more of a problem. The one that gives most cause for concern is weed growth. The number of sites with unacceptable levels of weed growth has risen over the past four years and 22% of sites are now failing to meet an acceptable standard, an increase of 6% on last year. Alongside this, 24% of people think that the condition of grassed areas, weed growth and overhanging trees are a problem in their area. This indicates that the decreasing conditions of weed growth on the ground are being noticed by the general public. It is also important to note that increasing weed growth can have subsequent effects on other environmental issues, such as detritus.

Ineffective or insufficient cleansing is resulting in detritus being left which can encourage weed growth. Another consequence of the high level of failures in relation to detritus is a massive 294% increase in the number of blocked drain covers. A build-up of the soil, grit and sand that makes up detritus is a key factor in the blockages, which can contribute to flooding, though none of the local authorities that we spoke to in our survey said that they had reduced gully clearing activities. Along with causing blockages, high levels of detritus and ineffective cleansing of roads can lead to the general condition of roads reducing in quality. This is important as 84% of people think it would be important to address the state of the roads in their area if they were in a poor condition and for 57%, the roads are in need of repair.

Reduced levels of street cleansing could be a result of budget cuts. Keep Britain Tidy wanted to clearly understand what the likely impact of budget cuts has on street cleansing and grounds maintenance services. To do this Keep Britain Tidy carried out a snapshot study with 32 local authorities to try to understand why there may have been a decline in standards in some areas. 50% of local authorities said they had to reduce front-line service budgets for street cleansing and grounds maintenance, but for the majority of these (79%) the cuts to their street cleansing budget were under 20%.

Those local authorities that had experienced budget cuts were asked if they had had been required to implement any cost-saving measures as a result of budgets cuts to front-line services.

Areas where local authorities have implemented cost saving measures



Of all the local authorities that had experienced budget cuts, 60% stated that they have reduced grass-cutting frequencies and 50% reduced the number of front-line grounds maintenance staff. It could be argued that the general public may be starting to notice this, with the public survey results showing that 24% of people think that the condition of grassed areas, weed growth and overhanging trees are a problem in their area.

In addition 20% of local authorities reduced weed spraying last year. However, looking at the 'on the ground' results, weed growth has been getting worse over the past four years, indicating reduced weed spraying has taken place in previous years as well as this year.

Looking at other results, to deal with budget cuts, 50% of local authorities have tried to make efficiencies by carrying out re-zoning exercises and 20% by making changes in service design. However, the budget cuts have mostly led to significant cut-backs in services. 50% of local authorities made a reduction in street cleansing frequencies and 55% made a reduction in the number of front-line street cleansing staff. This could account for the poor level of detritus, with 39% of sites falling below an acceptable standard for detritus and could be the reason why 3% more sites fell below an acceptable standard for litter (currently 18% of sites). As more front-line service cuts take effect the on going monitoring of performance will become increasingly vital to redirect resources to meet need and demand.

30% of the local authorities surveyed also stated an increased use of mechanical cleansing. When undertaking a service review with a view to reduce costs an increase in mechanical sweeping is often introduced. Mechanical sweeping is faster than manual litter-picking in terms of distance covered. However, an increase in mechanical sweeping can often result in a reduction in manual litter-picking. Mechanical sweeping although extremely productive can reduce the ability to access difficult-to-reach areas, such as between parked cars. This can therefore results in increased levels of litter on the ground.

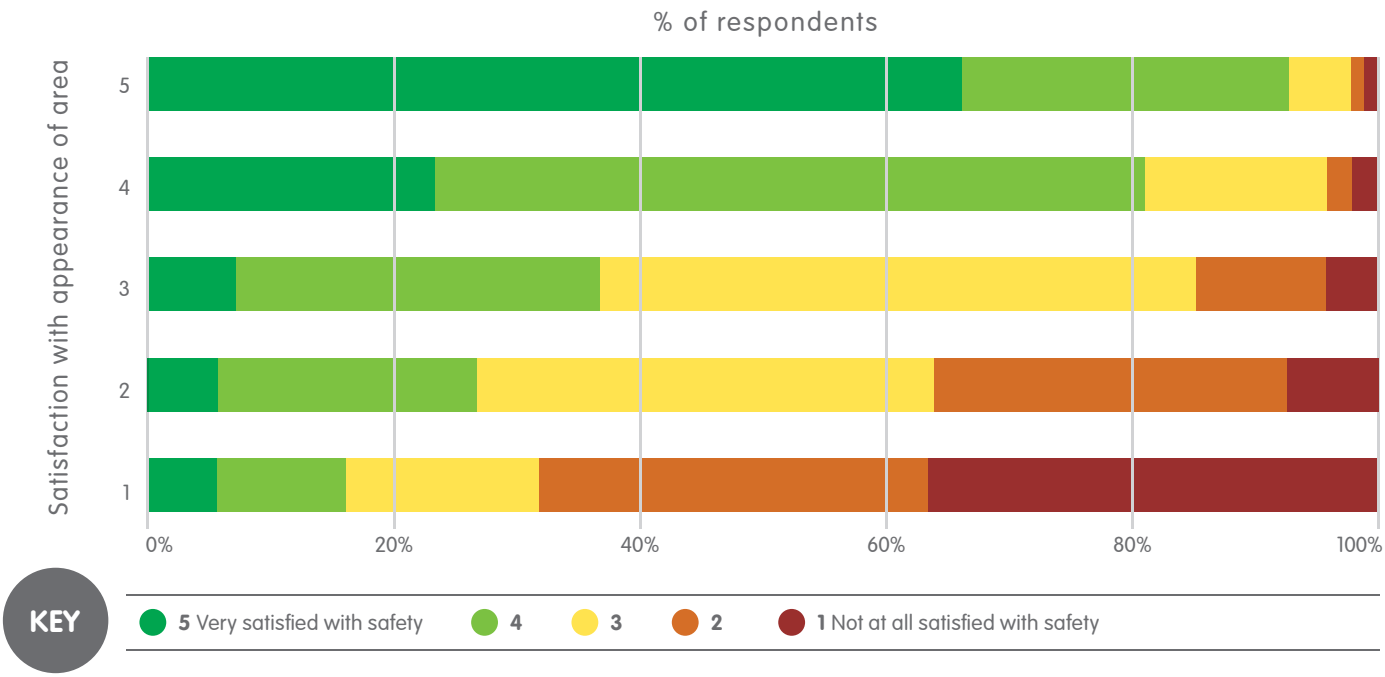
30% of the local authorities surveyed stated that they had made reductions in chewing gum removal activity. This could account for the 20% of sites that fell below an acceptable standard for staining as chewing gum isn't a huge contributing factor to poor levels of staining.

A significant number of local authorities also said that they had reduced monitoring of street-cleansing performance (45%) and monitoring of contractors performance (10%) and 40% said they reduced supervision of front-line staff. Monitoring is essential to ensure cleansing is being carried out effectively and efficiently. Without having this information, local authorities will not have the relevant information to inform effective and efficient service. 20% of local authorities said they reduced the level of staff training. This, along with the reduction in supervision, means that it will not be clear to local authorities if staff are performing at the correct level and undertaking tasks appropriately.

In terms of appearance of place, 40% of local authorities said they made closure of facilities/services and 45% reduced planting/bedding. This can have an impact on how our local areas feel and ultimately their satisfaction with their local areas.

Looking at the results for how satisfied or dissatisfied people are with the appearance of their local area, against how satisfied or dissatisfied they are that they feel safe there, shows that there is a clear link between cleanliness and safety.

Feelings of safety by satisfaction with local areas

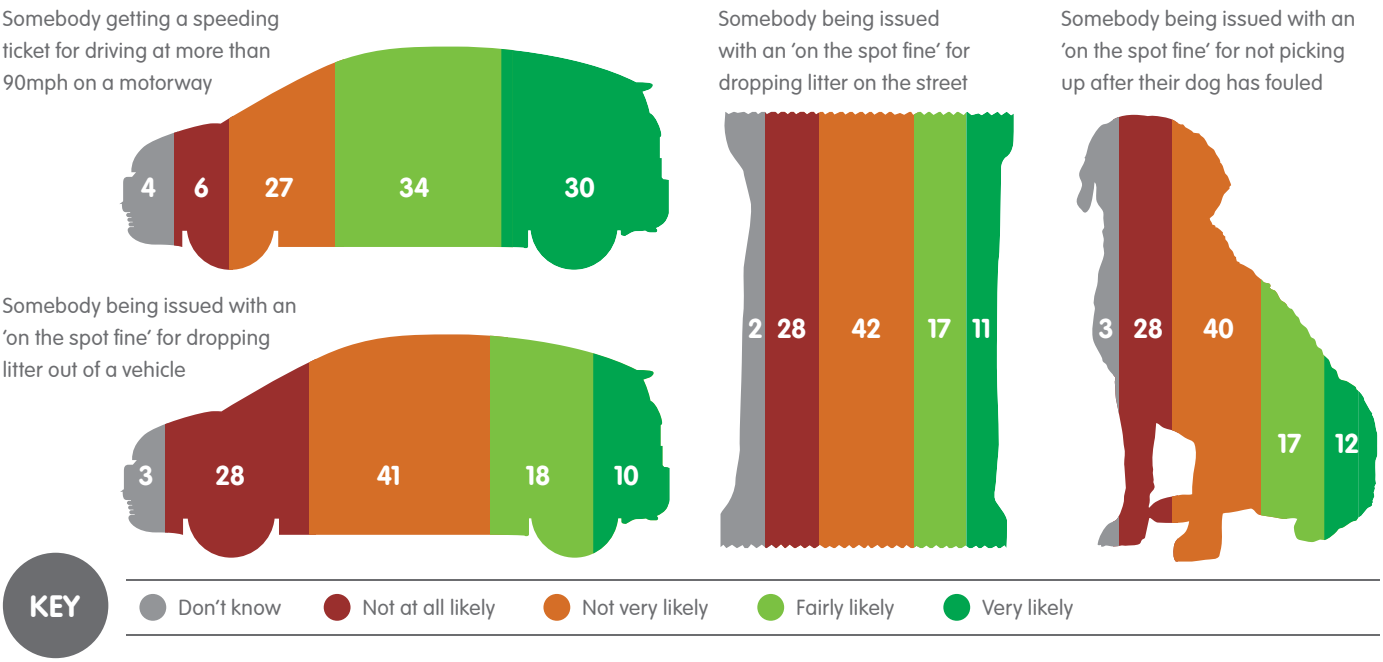


Enforcement

Three quarters of people (75%) think that people caught littering should be fined on the spot, but our other research[12] shows that, despite high levels of awareness that committing an environmental offence can lead to receiving a fixed penalty notice, 49% of people do not believe that they are effective in preventing people from committing environmental crimes. We found that attitudes to enforcement were greatly shaped by the degree to which people thought that receiving a fixed penalty notice for an environmental offence was a real threat. In actual fact, on the whole, the threat was considered to be very low. We wanted to explore this perception that the threat of being issued a fixed penalty notice is quite low.

12 The Effectiveness of Enforcement on Behaviour Change, Keep Britain Tidy, 2011

Likelihood of consequences of crime



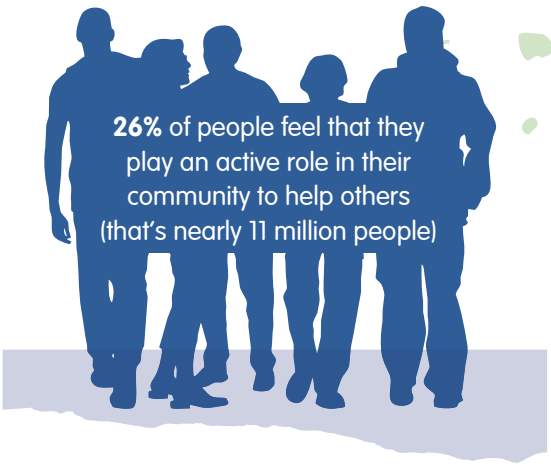
Around two thirds of people (64%) think that it is likely that somebody will get a speeding ticket for driving at more than 90mph on a motorway. This is in contrast to environmental crime, where only around a third of people believe that it is likely that someone will be issued with an 'on-the–spot' fine for not picking up after their dog has fouled (29%), dropping litter from a vehicle (28%), and dropping litter on the street (28%).

The reality is that local authorities do issue fixed penalty notices for environmental offences. Our snap shot survey with local authorities showed that 83% of the local authorities that participated in our survey had at least one full-time equivalent member of staff carrying out on the ground enforcement activity; with some (14%) having at least 10 full-time equivalent officers enforcing environmental offences. On average local authorities in our survey had around five full time equivalent officers issuing fixed penalty notices and conducting other enforcement activity in their area.

Our survey with 32 local authorities showed that while some (just under 50%) local authorities had not issued fixed penalty notices for dog fouling offences, more than a tenth had issued more than a 100 during 2011/12. On average the local authorities that were involved in our survey had issued 23 fixed penalty notices for dog fouling offences.

Community engagement

Community engagement is about active participation – people doing something together and getting involved in their local communities. In the current economic climate, community engagement activities are increasingly important, as the need for engaged communities becomes greater when local authorities are trying to deliver dramatic financial savings while trying to minimise the impact on their local communities and trying to reduce and manage the demand for local services.



Based on the English adult population of 41.7m at 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics, 2011.

Conclusion

The economic realities are clearly having an impact on people's perceptions and are increasing the levels of concern about some of our most basic needs - food, fuel and public transport. However, while these issues have risen in importance for the public, this does not mean there has been a reduction in concerns about the appearance of the place where they live, their access to quality green space and parks or their desire to be part of a thriving local community.

People still want to live in a clean and safe environment. They still want to see issues like litter and dog fouling tackled and more people feel guilty about dropping litter than throwing a 'sickie' or being given too much change in a shop and keeping it.

The question for everyone - government, councils, land managers, businesses, charities and communities - is how do we tackle these issues in the face of the harsh economic realities?

The answer is surely by working together, by encouraging personal and corporate responsibility, by innovating and by understanding that if we want to live in places where we feel safe and of which we can feel proud, we all have a role to play. We cannot leave it to any one organisation to make it happen.

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