

Making Fly-Tippers Pay: Tackling the Cost and Impact of Illegal Waste Dumping

To: All UK authorities

Introduction

The Government has launched an eight-week [consultation](#) on new powers to make fly-tippers clean up the communities they have damaged and pay the costs of dealing with their waste.

Published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on 20 August 2026, the proposals would give councils stronger enforcement powers, including the ability to issue conditional cautions requiring offenders to undertake up to 20 hours of unpaid clean-up work. Councils would also be able to recover the costs of clearing the waste directly from offenders.

The measures are intended to speed up enforcement, reduce reliance on lengthy court proceedings and ensure that taxpayers are not left to pay for the consequences of waste crime.

Key points

1. New clean-up powers for councils

The proposals would allow local authorities to issue conditional cautions to fly-tipping offenders. These could require offenders to undertake up to 20 hours of

unpaid work, including cleaning streets and public spaces affected by their offending.

This could provide councils with a more immediate enforcement response, particularly where taking every case through the courts is resource intensive.

2. Offenders could be required to pay clean-up costs

A central element of the proposals is the ability for councils to recover the costs of clearing fly-tipped waste directly from offenders.

This is significant for local authorities because fly-tipping places considerable pressure on already stretched waste, cleansing and environmental enforcement budgets. The principle behind the proposals is that those responsible for the waste, rather than local taxpayers, should bear the financial consequences.

3. Part of a wider Government crackdown on waste crime

The announcement follows a series of measures aimed at strengthening local authority enforcement.

In July 2026, the Government [announced](#) an increase in the maximum on-the-spot fine for fly-tipping from £1,000 to £5,000, representing a 400% increase.

Councils have also received [guidance](#) on identifying and seizing vehicles used in fly-tipping, including advice on securing convictions against vehicle owners.

4. Greater partnership working

The Government has also announced a new Tackling Waste Crime Alliance, intended to bring together government, regulators, police and councils to strengthen the response to waste criminals.

This recognises that tackling organised waste crime often requires cooperation beyond individual council boundaries.

5. Potential benefits for local environmental services

If implemented effectively, the proposals could help councils restore fly-tipped locations more quickly while improving the visibility and credibility of enforcement.

There is also potential for offenders undertaking clean-up work to directly see the consequences of their actions and contribute to restoring the communities they have damaged.

6. Implementation and resources will be important

While the proposals could provide councils with additional enforcement tools, their effectiveness will depend on the resources available to investigate offences, identify offenders, administer conditional cautions and supervise unpaid work.

Councils will also need clear national guidance on how costs are calculated and recovered, how unpaid clean-up work is managed, and how the new powers interact with existing enforcement procedures.

Summary

The Government's latest proposals represent a further move towards a "polluter pays" approach to fly-tipping enforcement.

For councils, the prospect of recovering clean-up costs and requiring offenders to undertake unpaid community clean-up work could provide additional tools for tackling a persistent problem. However, successful implementation will depend on ensuring that councils have the capacity, guidance and enforcement support necessary to use the powers effectively.

The consultation provides an important opportunity for local authorities to highlight the practical realities of tackling fly-tipping, including the costs of

investigation, enforcement, evidence gathering, waste removal and site restoration.

The [consultation](#) is open for eight weeks and closes on 16 October 2026. APSE would encourage its' member councils to respond to the consultation.

APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the Government's proposals to make fly-tippers take greater responsibility for the environmental and financial damage they cause. Councils should not be left to meet the cost of clearing waste dumped and fly tips and stronger enforcement powers are therefore a positive development.

New powers must be accompanied by adequate resources and practical support for councils. Local authority environmental services are already operating under significant financial and workforce pressures, while investigating and prosecuting fly-tipping can be time-consuming and complex.

The proposed conditional cautions and cost-recovery powers could be particularly valuable if they enable councils to secure quicker outcomes without unnecessarily increasing pressure on already stretched court and enforcement systems. Clear national guidance, proportionate processes and effective partnership working with the Environment Agency and police will be essential.

Enforcement should sit alongside prevention, intelligence-led surveillance, public reporting and education, creating a comprehensive local approach to waste crime. The new Tackling Waste Alliance could provide an important mechanism for sharing intelligence and good practice between councils and enforcement agencies.

APSE welcomes measures that strengthen enforcement against fly-tipping and increase financial accountability for offenders. The hope is that these measures reduce repeat offending, recover the costs of environmental clean-up, and deliver cleaner, safer and better-quality local neighbourhoods.

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