

Fly-tipping in Wales

Research Briefing

November 2025



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Fly-tipping is a criminal offence and refers to waste illegally deposited on land. It poses a threat to communities and wildlife, and negatively impacts mental health due to reduced environmental quality in local communities.

This research briefing introduces fly-tipping in Wales. It discusses the offence of fly-tipping, as well as its impacts and causes. It provides an overview of current and previous Welsh Government fly-tipping strategies, as well as exploring the scale of fly-tipping in Wales today.

It considers the penalties and enforcement actions associated with fly-tipping, as well as whose responsibility it is to enforce these. This briefing also discusses the importance of enforcement and recent changes to fly-tipping regulations.



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1. Introduction to fly-tipping

Fly-tipping as an offence

Fly-tipping is the common term used to describe **waste illegally deposited on land**. This refers to dumping **waste in a location other than an authorised rubbish dump**.

Fly-tipping is a criminal offence under **section 33 of the *Environmental Protection Act 1990 (the 1990 Act)***:

a person shall not... deposit controlled waste, or knowingly cause or knowingly permit controlled waste to be deposited in or on any land unless a waste management licence authorising the deposit is in force and the deposit is in accordance with the licence.

Furthermore, under **section 34 of the 1990 Act**, householders and businesses have a duty to ensure their waste is disposed of correctly. For instance, a householder will need to check whether the person they have given their waste to is authorised to dispose of it (i.e. they have a waste carrier licence) or that they are not disposing of waste in any area other than an authorised rubbish dump.

Impacts of fly-tipping

Fly-tipping poses a threat to communities and wildlife via **disease transmission, pollution, soil contamination and making areas more vulnerable to drainage and flooding**. Poor environmental quality in local communities as a result of fly-tipping can also have a **negative impact on people's mental health and wellbeing, and lead to increases in anti-social behaviour** which often disproportionately affects more deprived communities.

In some areas of Wales, residents say the level of fly-tipping is causing issues with **selling their homes**, and some residents say **they've given up reporting fly-tipping** incidents due to a lack of action from councils.

Whilst fly-tipping incidents have **declined since 2006**, Welsh local authorities spent nearly **£2 million** on clearing fly-tipping incidents in 2023-24 and over £65 million was spent on street cleansing operations in the same period. It is important to note that spending figures on fly-tipping **may exclude the cost incurred by private landowners** in removing waste from their land.

According to the Welsh Government, wider **economic and social impacts** of fly-tipping include decreased tourism in local economies due to the negative

visual impact of litter and fly-tipping. The loss of recyclable or reusable materials also detracts from the Welsh Government's aim of establishing a **circular Welsh economy**.

Causes of fly-tipping

The causes of fly-tipping are **varied and can include factors such as:**

- financial gain or saving by the perpetrator;
- a lack of waste disposal facilities or access to them; and
- laziness and an attitude that clearing the waste is someone else's problem.

Direct causes

Fly-tipping can start at a small scale with individuals littering; Natural Resources Wales (NRW) found that **25% of the Welsh population feel that it is acceptable to drop or leave something if there isn't a bin nearby**.

Business-related waste is a common cause of larger scale fly-tipping. For example, businesses and industries can produce large amounts of waste and some will choose to fly-tip rather than pay to safely dispose of it. Where companies do pay for disposal, some waste companies will charge to take away the waste but then dump it illegally to avoid the costs of an authorised waste facility.

Indirect causes

NRW says **reduced local authority budgets, leading to reduced rubbish removal and emptying of public waste bins**, are an indirect cause of fly-tipping. This has knock-on effects that mean litter can be dispersed by other means, for example, wind blowing rubbish out of bins, or wildlife pulling litter out of full bins.

The frequency of household general waste collections across Wales has decreased due to the **prioritisation of recycling**. Most local authorities have implemented **fortnightly, three weekly or monthly general waste collections**.

Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) play a crucial role in tackling fly-tipping as they are the **sole alternative destination** of any waste not collected in general waste collections. There are issues with HWRCs that can lead to increases in fly-tipping incidents. In a **2022 report** on fly-tipping, Keep Wales Tidy stated that:

Like any other service, the experience of attending a HWRC will not only dictate future willingness to engage with the service but will be heavily

influenced by and through the experience of other users in the area [...] Some social media discussions have even seen people defending fly-tipping because of actual (or perceived) challenges to using the local recycling centre.

Rules **for the use of HWRCs also vary between** local authorities. **Barriers** such as new or unfamiliar booking systems, changes in opening times, increased closures of local HWRCs, and visit restrictions mean that **45% of respondents** to a **2021 Keep Wales Tidy survey** who had visited their recycling centre reported experiencing a problem disposing of their waste.

Previous Welsh Government fly-tipping strategies

The Welsh Government has mostly aimed to address littering and fly-tipping in Wales by **supporting and empowering communities to tackle issues at a local level**. For example, the Welsh Government provides grant funding to a range of organisations including all 22 local authorities in Wales, community groups, third sector organisations such as Keep Wales Tidy and bodies such as NRW. As well as this, the **duty of care campaign** funded by the Welsh Government seeks to influence large-scale behaviour change at the national level, however the Welsh Government notes that this has proven difficult as it requires a **consistent and coherent approach** to be delivered across Wales.

Fly-tipping strategies from 2007 – 2015

In 2007, the Welsh Government published its Fly-tipping Strategy and funded a five-year initiative known as **Fly-tipping Action Wales (FtAW)**. This was followed by consultations in **2012-13** and **2014** that resulted in the 2015 strategy document – **A Fly-tipping Free Wales**. The strategy worked towards four outcomes:

- all key organisations in Wales commit to eliminating fly-tipping;
- fly-tipping is widely understood as being socially unacceptable;
- it becomes easier for people to deal with their waste responsibly; and
- anyone who fly-tips is caught and punished appropriately.

Fly-tipping strategy since 2021

In 2021, the Welsh Government undertook another consultation – **A Litter and Fly-tipping Free Wales** – which sought views on the combination the **previous strategy** on fly-tipping with the ambition to tackle littering and focused on five key litter and fly-tipping prevention themes:

- waste reduction;
- evidence, monitoring and evaluation;
- education and behaviour change;
- effective enforcement; and
- efficient operational delivery.

Following its 2021 consultation, the Welsh Government **established a Data and Evidence Group** and reaffirmed its commitment to tackle littering and fly-tipping under one plan.

As well as this, the Welsh Government has **increased funding for FtAW and Keep Wales Tidy in 2024**, and in July 2025, released a **written statement on littering and fly-tipping**. In the statement, the Welsh Government says it will continue to provide grant funding to partners like FtAW and Keep Wales Tidy and will support local authorities and FtAW in expanding their enforcement capabilities. It also says it is working with local authorities to “identify and promote examples of good practice and consistency when tackling poor local environmental quality”.

Cross Party Group on Littering, Fly-tipping and Waste Reduction

The Senedd Cross Party Group (CPG) on Littering, Fly-tipping and Waste Reduction was formed to:

...bring together key organisations and decision-makers from across Wales to identify and champion best practise; develop action and legislative recommendations for the Welsh Government, and raise public awareness of key issues and initiatives.

The CPG currently consists of Members of the Senedd and representatives from **Natural Resources Wales**, **Keep Wales Tidy**, **Friends of the Earth Cymru**, **the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)** and **Beddau Litter Pickers**.

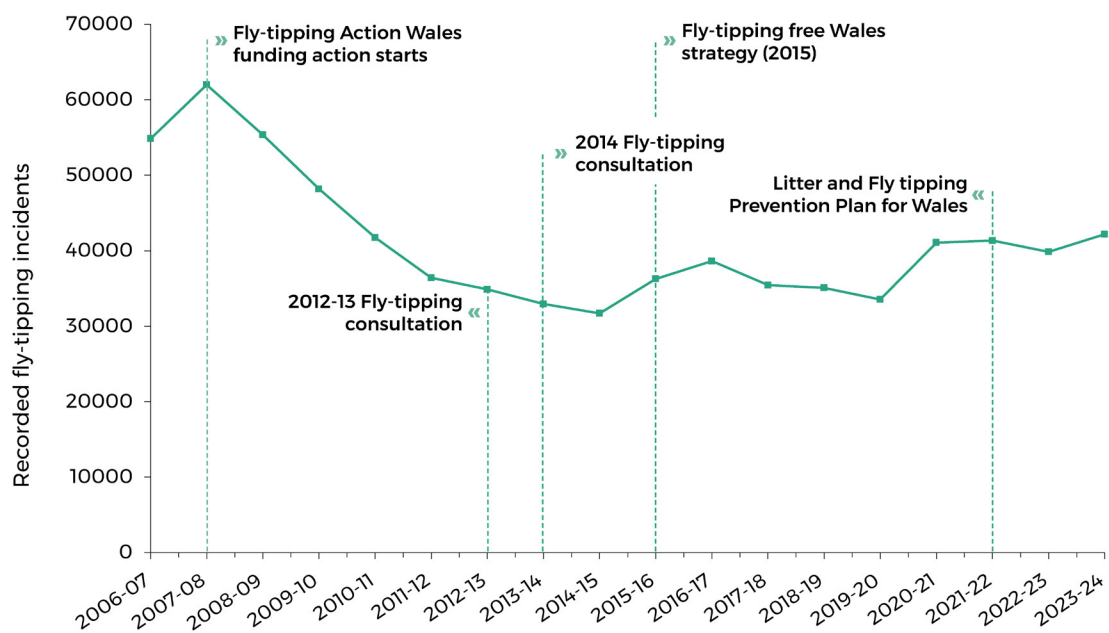
In June 2025, the CPG released manifesto proposals entitled **“Which Wales do we want to see?”**. The **CEO of Keep Wales Tidy said** he hopes the proposals are of assistance to “all political parties at the Senedd in compiling their manifestos for [the] 2026 Senedd election”.

2. The scale of fly-tipping in Wales

The **Welsh Government publishes data** on the number of recorded fly-tipping incidents and where they occurred. The quality of the data used in this section was **reviewed by the Welsh Government in 2023**, and is looked at in more detail at the end of this chapter.

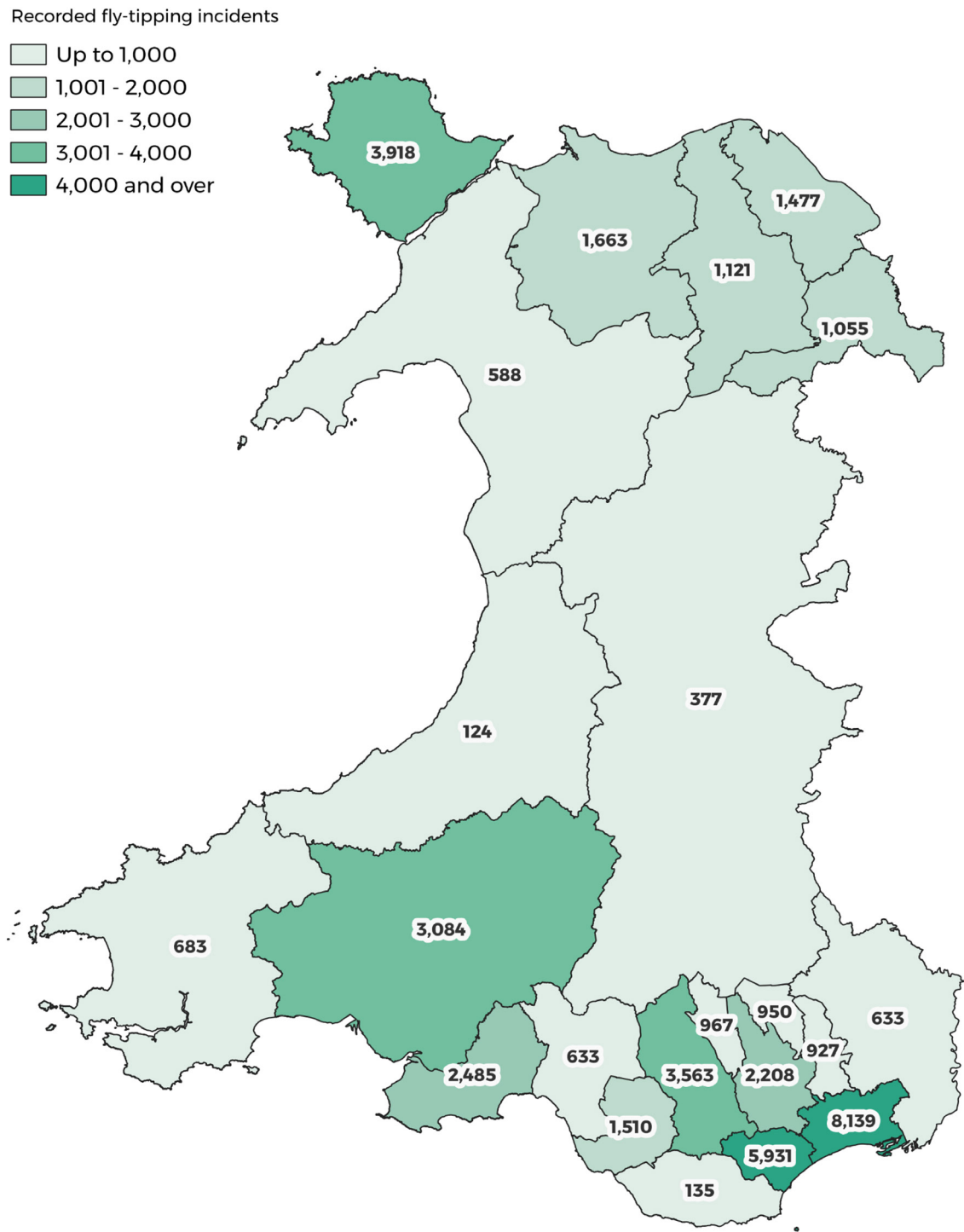
Recorded incidents of fly-tipping in Wales decreased from 61,995 in 2007-08 to a low of 31,713 in 2014-15. However, they have since increased, reaching 42,171 in 2023-24.

Figure 1. Recorded fly-tipping incidents and selected actions by the Welsh Government, 2006-2024



Source: **StatsWales**

Figure 2. Recorded fly-tipping incidents by local authority, 2023-24



Source: [StatsWales](#)

In 2023-24, the local authority with the **highest number of recorded fly-tipping incidents was Newport (8,139)**, followed by Cardiff (5,931). The Isle of Anglesey had the third highest number of reported incidents, despite **ranking 20th** in population amongst the 22 local authorities.

Fly-tipping data collection

Fly-tipping data is challenging to record, and it is almost impossible to gather an **entirely 'true' picture of the problem** due to the nature of the crime.

Fly-tipping data entry

In April 2004, **WasteDataFlow**, a web-based system for municipal waste data reporting, went live for use by local authorities. Each quarter, local authorities submit their fly-tipping data to the system. The data submitted includes information on the size and nature of every recorded fly-tipping incident, the cost of dealing with it, and any enforcement action taken. FtAW then quality checks this data before publishing it annually on **the Welsh Government website**.

Prior to WasteDataFlow separate questionnaires about fly-tipping would be issued to local authorities, and these were **often repetitive**. The original aim of WasteDataFlow was to replace these questionnaires and instead switch to one essential dataset collected by a more standardised form of data collection.

The Welsh Government has also funded a GPS mapping system – **FlyMapper** – which local authorities use to assist in the recording process as it enables additional spatial and visual data to be gathered.

Data quality review

In 2023, the Welsh Government published a **quality review of local authority recorded fly-tipping data**. The report discussed the strengths and limitations of the data.

Limitations of the data include inconsistencies in the way data is recorded in local authorities, for example, differences in size estimates and the exact location of the incident not being recorded. As well as this, fly-tipping on private land is thought to be underreported, so a full picture of all fly-tipping incidents may be missing.

When looking at the data, care should be taken when interpreting the figures due to **changes and improvements in data reporting mechanisms and associated guidance**.

Furthermore, the number of investigation actions has fallen over time, but this may be due to stricter guidance on what actions can be included. For example, warning letters should only be included when they have been sent to the perpetrator in relation to a specific fly-tipping incident.

Since the quality report, further **validation measures have been introduced** to the data entry process in local authorities. For more detailed information on the quality of fly-tipping data in Wales, see the **'Quality' section in the 2023 report**.

3. Fly-tipping penalties and enforcement actions

Fly-tipping and littering penalties

Both fly-tipping and littering are criminal offences, with the distinction between offences, and any subsequent penalties, **usually based on the size of the waste**.

Litter is legislated for under **part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990** (as amended by the **Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005**), and fly-tipping is covered under **part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990** (as amended by **the Unauthorised Deposit of Waste (Fixed Penalties) (Wales) Regulations 2017**).

The legislation sets a maximum penalty for littering of up to £2500 via a Fixed Penalty Notice. Local authorities have the power to specify the level of fine that will apply in their area, with a standard default amount of £75 if they choose not to do so.

For fly-tipping offences, the legislation states that in a Magistrates Court the maximum penalty is an unlimited fine and/or 12 months imprisonment. Offences dealt with in the Crown Court are punishable via an unlimited fine and/or 5 years imprisonment. The Court may also make an order that:

- requires the offender to pay the costs associated with the enforcement and investigation of the case;
- allows the seizure of any vehicles that were involved in the offence; and

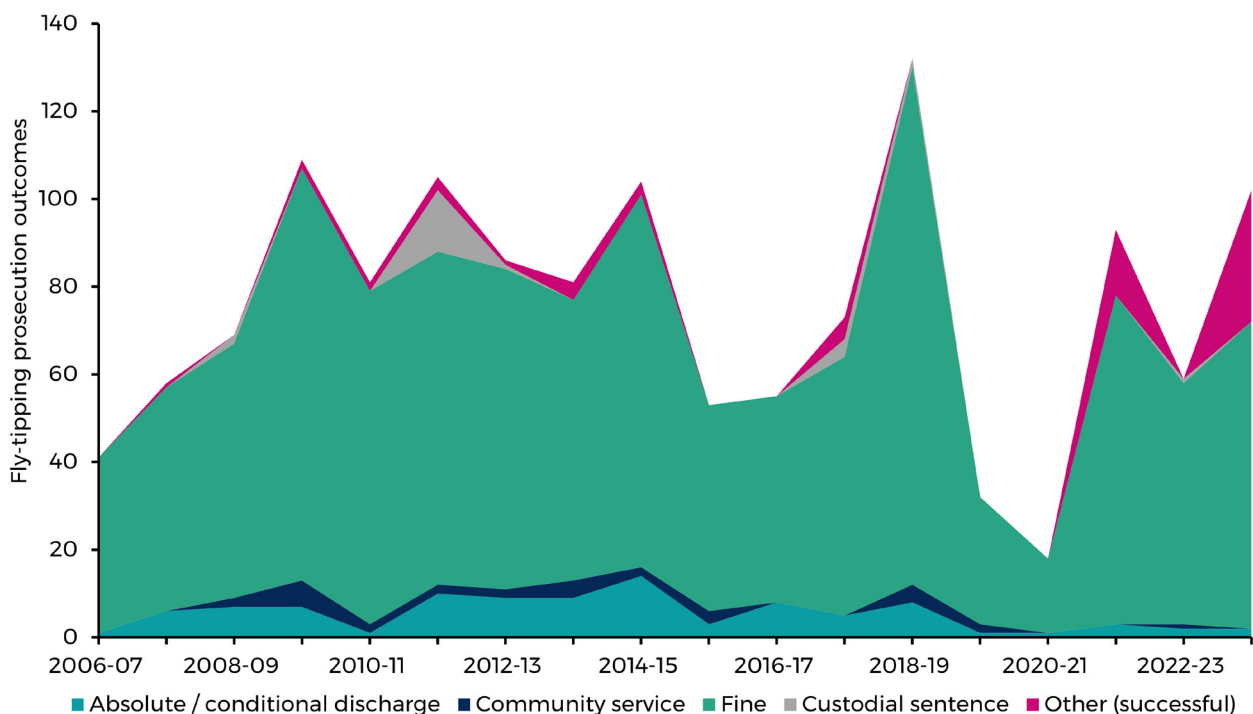
- orders the offender to pay the costs of removal of the illegally deposited (fly-tipped) waste.

There are a range of other possible penalties for fly-tipping offences, for example, driving bans, an electronic tagging curfew and community service.

Prosecutions and enforcement actions

The number of fly-tipping prosecutions since 2006 has varied from 18 (in 2020-21) to 122 (2018-19). The low number in 2020-21 is likely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 3. Fly-tipping prosecution outcomes, 2006-2024



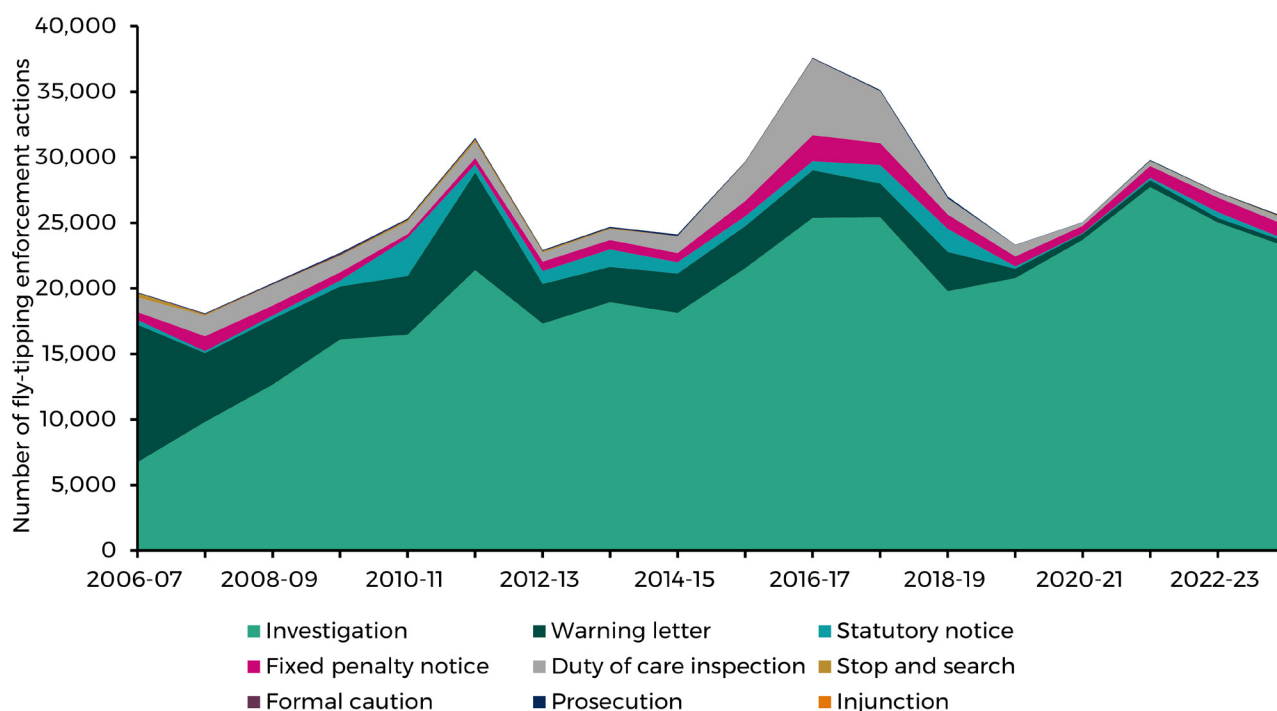
This stacked area chart shows how different categories contribute to a total over time – the total height represents the sum of all categories, while each coloured band shows that category's share of the total. The thickness of a colour, not its height from the baseline, indicates how much it contributes in each year. For example, in 2023-24 there were 102 prosecution outcomes, of which 2 were absolute/conditional discharges, 70 were fines and 30 were other (successful) prosecutions.

Source: **StatsWales**

The types of punishment used have changed over time. Although fines remain the most common outcome, absolute/conditional discharges and community service outcomes have decreased. 'Other (successful)' refers to any **other positive results awarded by the court in this period.**

The level of enforcement action taken has stayed more consistent since 2006, with investigation making up a large proportion of total enforcement actions. Warning letters and duty of care inspections (**businesses being asked to provide waste transfer notes or a household being investigated for possible breaches of their duty**) are also commonly used.

Figure 4. Number of fly-tipping enforcement actions, 2006-2024



This stacked area chart shows how different categories contribute to a total over time – the total height represents the sum of all categories, while each coloured band shows that category's share of the total. The thickness of a colour, not its height from the baseline, indicates how much it contributes in each year. For example, in 2023-24, there were over 23,000 investigations, 384 warning letters, 163 statutory notices, over 1000 fixed penalty notices, 448 duty of care inspections, 64 stop and searches, 3 formal cautions and 102 prosecutions.

Source: **StatsWales**

4. Responsibilities

Enforcement by local authorities

Local authorities have **no statutory duty to investigate fly-tipping**, which may lead to resources for enforcement taking second place to duties such as the collection and disposal of household waste.

Enforcement officers in local authorities are responsible for issuing penalties as well as increasing education and engagement on the issue.

A **2022 Keep Wales Tidy report** found the number of enforcement officers employed in local authorities ranges from 0 to 15, with an average of 2-3. The report suggests that the variation in number of enforcement officers is:

...significant as the effectiveness of enforcement as a deterrent to behaviour is entirely dependent on the belief of actually being caught. Without a widespread visible presence, this belief is hard to solidify.

Gathering evidence for a successful prosecution also involves significant time and money, but according to **Keep Wales Tidy**, the penalties imposed by the Courts can be variable and often “do not send strong enough messages about the crime being committed”.

Keep Wales Tidy has called for **environmental crime training for Magistrates** to increase the understanding of the impacts of fly-tipping and to help to improve the consistency of approach across Wales.

New regulations and the Joint Unit for Waste Crime

In 2018, the **Waste Enforcement (England and Wales) Regulations** provided two new powers:

- The power for waste regulation authorities (the Environment Agency in England and Natural Resources Wales) and waste collection authorities (local authorities) to serve a notice on an owner or occupier to remove waste that is unlawfully kept or disposed of, irrespective of whether it was initially lawfully deposited.
- The power for waste regulation authorities to restrict access and importation of waste into premises that are, or were, a regulated or an exempt waste facility for up to 72 hours by issuing a restriction notice.

Also, in **2018, an independent review of serious and organised crime in the waste sector**, published by the UK Government, recommended the establishment

of a Joint Unit for Waste Crime (JUWC) led by the environmental regulators with law enforcement agencies from across the devolved governments.

The JUWC was established in 2020 and consists of eight partners including **the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales, the National Crime Agency, and the British Transport Police.**

The JUWC says its priorities are:

- Prepare – reduce the impact of waste criminality where it takes place.
- Prevent – prevent people from engaging in serious and organised crime.
- Protect – protect the UK’s critical infrastructure, environment, and communities.
- Pursue – prosecute and disrupt people engaged in serious and organised criminality.

In its **2024-25 end of year report**, the JUWC reported that that it had led or supported 34 operations, organised and/or attended 70 days of action, supported 13 arrests on these days of action and delivered 40 awareness raising or training presentations. The JUWC did not specify how many, if any, of these activities took place in Wales.