

## Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on PE2121: Run a targeted roadside litter awareness campaign

The petitioner is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to run a campaign targeted at companies to raise awareness of the harms caused by roadside litter and the penalties that could be brought against responsible parties.

### Roadside litter in Scotland

Keep Scotland Beautiful (a Scottish charity) states that [50 tonnes of litter is abandoned on Scotland's roadsides each month](#). According to [the annual Scottish Litter Survey 2024](#) (published November 2024 and also carried out by Keep Scotland Beautiful), which tracks public perceptions of litter, around nine in ten people in Scotland view litter as a national problem. Seven in ten people believe it is a problem in their local area. People are more likely to view litter as a problem in the least affluent communities and in urban areas.

The 2024 survey set out that 88% of respondents viewed roadside litter as a problem in Scotland. More than 90% of respondents said roadside litter creates a negative impression of Scotland, and more than 50% of respondents thought there is more litter on roadsides than a year ago.

The [Scottish Government's National Litter and Flytipping Strategy](#) (published 2023) recognises that roadside litter is an issue in Scotland, stating that audits undertaken by both local authorities and Keep Scotland Beautiful, covering 12,803 individual sites assessed for local environmental quality in 2021/2022, found that litter is a “widespread issue on hard standing areas, open spaces and road verges, observed on four out of every five sites audited”.

The Strategy also has [an associated Action Plan for 2023-24](#). It does not specifically mention roadside litter but includes potentially relevant workstreams, such as collaborative work between agencies and local authorities and support for communities. Key public bodies and groups with actions under the plan are the Scottish Government, Keep Scotland Beautiful, SEPA and Zero Waste Scotland.

### Previous Keep Scotland Beautiful roadside litter campaign

Keep Scotland Beautiful [ran a roadside litter reduction campaign, 'Give Your Litter a Lift' from 2016-2019](#). The charity also states that it has worked with partners to [develop and test targeted interventions and infrastructure to tackle](#)

[the issue](#) and has worked with Road Operating Companies to build understanding of the origins, scale and impact of roadside litter.

## Who is responsible for roadsides?

[Section 89 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) places duties on certain organisations to, so far as is practicable, ensure that their land or land that is under their control is kept clear of litter, and to ensure that public roads for which the body is responsible are kept clean. [Statutory guidance was published in 2018](#) on complying with these duties which sets out which bodies are subject to them ([also discussed on the Keep Scotland Beautiful website](#)).

## Offences and penalties

Littering in a public open space is a criminal offence under [the Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) (section 87). A person who has littered can be issued with a fixed penalty notice of £80 or could be prosecuted and risk a fine of up to £2,500. Local authorities also have [powers to designate certain areas as Litter Control Areas](#), which places duties on the occupier to ensure it is kept free of litter as far as practicable.

[Section 18 of the Circular Economy \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#), when commenced, will enable the issuing of civil penalties for littering from a vehicle. This new civil penalty regime allows for the registered keeper of the vehicle to be held responsible for littering from that vehicle. This change [stemmed from a 2021 Scottish Government review of Scotland's national litter strategy](#).

## Wider circular economy policy

The Scottish Government's commitment to transition to a circular economy, with associated aims to reduce waste, increase recycling and reuse and tackle 'throwaway' culture, are also relevant to how litter is addressed. Specific interventions include the planned [Deposit Return Scheme](#) and developments in [Extended Producer Responsibility](#), which seek to put more responsibility on to producers for how products are disposed of. More detail is set out in [the draft Circular Economy and Waste Routemap](#).

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The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

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