

# Local environmental quality in decline

Further analysis by Keep Scotland Beautiful



The impact of declining local environmental quality  
on Scotland's communities

October 2017







# Introduction

**Poor local environmental quality is having a negative impact every day on the lives of over one million people living in Scotland.**

In March 2016, we published Scotland's Local Environmental Quality in Decline<sup>1</sup> which highlighted that, after years of steady improvement, environmental quality was declining in communities across Scotland. The report was informed by our analysis of the annual data we had collected from 14,000 surveys of council areas across Scotland, which measured the agreed local environmental quality indicators which are: litter, dog fouling, graffiti, flytipping, detritus and weeds.

Our 2016 report recognised that, despite the best efforts of councils, public bodies and local communities, this decline was being driven by a complex combination of political, social and economic factors. These include a lack of strategic priority for local environmental quality, reductions in public expenditure nationally and locally, a fragmented approach to tackling the problem, changes in our consumption habits and unacceptable individual behaviours.

The report concluded that if the current approach did not change then the decline would continue, the effect on local communities would worsen and the negative impact of poor local environmental quality would start to become more apparent across a broader range of policy areas such as health and wellbeing, education and the economy. We also identified that it was likely that those communities most affected by deprivation would also suffer the most impacts.

That is why, as part of our commitment to progressing the actions identified in our 2016 report, we have undertaken further analysis to deepen our understanding of local environmental quality in communities across Scotland. This analysis identified that, regrettably, overall the decline continues. In fact, our evidence shows that local environmental quality is getting worse generally and, alarmingly, at a faster rate in our most deprived communities.

This report provides an update based on current data and highlights why, now more than ever, there is a need

for a Scotland-wide focus on what is, fundamentally, a social justice issue.

A failure to act now will not only hamper our collective ability to achieve successful outcomes in key policy areas including health and wellbeing, education, criminal justice, the economy and tourism; but also will have long-term consequences for our most deprived communities.

It is important to acknowledge that the decline in local environmental quality is not an issue that can be tackled by any one organisation – all stakeholders can and should be doing more to tackle this issue collectively, across sectors, and in partnership with communities.

That is why in September 2017 we brought together key stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors to discuss the challenges posed by poor local environmental quality, (in particular for Scotland's most deprived communities), and the impact this can have on achieving broader policy outcomes and objectives. We also discussed how we could work better together to develop collaborative action that could be embedded in organisational plans and objectives.

A key output from this discussion was recognition that if we want to achieve long term, sustainable change in local environmental quality there needs to be better and more effective engagement with those communities most affected, working with them to address local issues and empowering them to provide solutions for themselves.

As Scotland's only national charity concerned with addressing local environmental quality issues in communities, we remain ready to work with all relevant stakeholders to help reverse this worrying decline.

<sup>1</sup> Keep Scotland Beautiful. 2017. Our Reports and Publications | Keep Scotland Beautiful. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org/about-us/our-reports-and-publications/>.

# Summary of findings

## Local environmental quality in Scotland reaches lowest point in a decade.

Over the last eighteen months there has been marked increase in the presence of litter, flytipping, graffiti and weeds in communities across the country.

Public perception surveys indicate that the quality of the local environment remains an issue that matters to people.

## Deprived communities most affected by poor local environmental quality.

Local environmental quality is declining more severely and at a faster rate in our most deprived communities.

More than a million people in Scotland are now living in places where local environmental quality is declining more rapidly than the national average.

Gap between local environmental quality indicators in the most deprived and the most affluent communities is widening.

## Poor local environmental quality has wider impacts on key policy areas.

**Health and wellbeing:** Those who perceive their local environment to be poor are more likely to report poorer physical and mental health.

**Crime:** Poor local environmental quality significantly contributes to people's fear of crime and how safe they feel in the area that they live in.

**Economy:** Poor local environmental quality negatively impacts economic development at a national and local level.

## What needs to happen?

Focused national and local leadership on local environmental quality.

Recognition of the challenges and impact posed by poor local environmental quality, particularly in our most deprived communities.

Greater understanding of the impacts poor local environmental quality has on achieving positive outcomes in other policy areas.

More strategic and coordinated activity across sectors with actions to tackle the decline in local environmental quality reflected in organisational plans and objectives.

Increased support to, and empowerment of, communities to build capacity to take action to reverse the decline, especially in deprived areas.

# Research and analysis

**As part of our commitment to the actions identified in our 2016 report, we undertook further analysis over the last 18 months to assess the degree to which those communities that are identified as Scotland's most deprived are affected by declining local environmental quality.**

We also reviewed the most up to date evidence available from national and local sources on how the public perceive local environmental quality and related issues.

Finally, we considered a broad range of evidence available on the wider impacts of poor local environmental quality on achieving key outcomes and objectives across a range of policy areas.

## **From the most deprived to the most affluent**

Using the most recent data collected by ourselves and local authorities about local environmental quality through LEAMS (Local Environmental Audit Management System)<sup>2</sup> and the SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) dataset<sup>3</sup> published by the Scottish Government we have been able, for the first time, to profile local environmental quality in communities across Scotland for 2014-2017.

LEAMS<sup>4</sup> provides the data which forms the basis of the information on street cleanliness and local environmental quality which is reported by local authorities across Scotland through the Local Government Benchmarking Framework<sup>5</sup>. It provides a robust overview and a dataset using 14,000 data-points from across the country.

The system has allowed local authorities to measure trends in street cleanliness and local environmental quality for over 10 years across Scotland.

Cross-referencing the two datasets has enabled us to profile changes in the key indicators of local environmental quality<sup>6</sup> in communities across

Scotland, from the most deprived to the most affluent. The results are displayed in the form of graphs, with accompanying analysis, in the following section of this report.

## **A concern for communities**

To assess how public perception of local environmental quality and related issues had developed in recent years we were able to review data from the Scottish Household Survey 2016 published by the Scottish Government as well as analysing the findings of surveys undertaken by local authorities across Scotland.

Key information in relation to how the public perceive local environmental quality and related issues is outlined in the following section of this report.

## **Articulating the wider consequences of decline in a social justice context**

Recognising the need to strengthen the links between the evidence we hold, and the evidence held by other bodies on the wider impacts of poor local environmental quality, we undertook a review of relevant research examining the link between poor local environmental quality and the potential negative impacts it can cause across many policy areas including health and wellbeing, education criminal justice, the economy and tourism.

Key results from this review can be seen on page 8.

<sup>2</sup>Keep Scotland Beautiful. 2016. Environmental Auditing Assessments | Keep Scotland Beautiful. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/environmental-services/environmental-auditing-assessments/>.

<sup>3</sup>Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. 2016. Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation . [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD>.

<sup>4</sup>Data sources: LEAMS. 2013. Data sources: LEAMS. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/ArtsCultureSport/Sport/MajorEvents/Glasgow-2014/Commonwealth-games/Indicators/LEAMS>.

<sup>5</sup>Local Government Benchmarking Framework - home page. 2017. Local Government Benchmarking Framework - home page. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/>.

<sup>6</sup>Data sources: LEAMS. 2013. Data sources: LEAMS. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/ArtsCultureSport/Sport/MajorEvents/Glasgow-2014/Commonwealth-games/Indicators/LEAMS>.

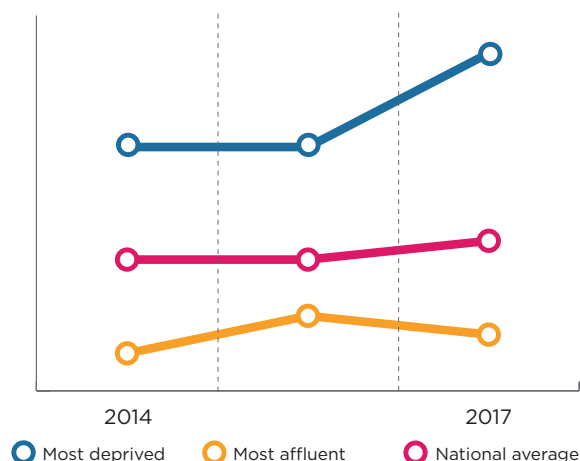
# The problem

## From the most deprived to the most affluent

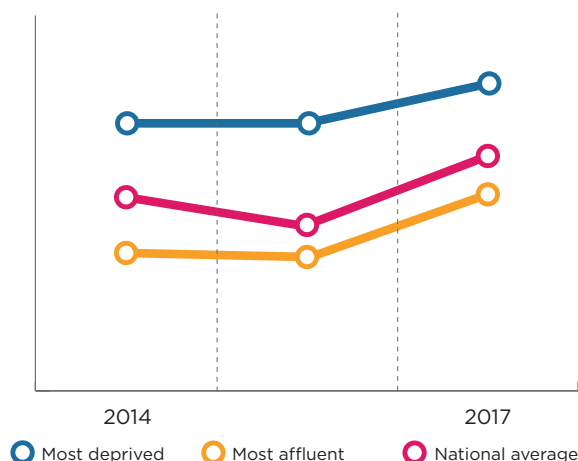
We analysed the data for the six key indicators of local environmental quality and established the national average for the period 2014-2017. For the same period, we tracked performance against each indicator in the most deprived and most affluent communities – this shows significant differences.

- Overall, local environmental quality in Scotland has reached its lowest point in over a decade.
- There has been a national marked increase over the last 18 months in the presence of litter, flytipping, and graffiti in communities across Scotland.
- Encouragingly, there has been a reduction in dog fouling nationally.
- Local environmental quality is declining more severely and at a faster rate in the most deprived communities.
- The gap between the indicators for litter, flytipping and graffiti in the most deprived and the most affluent communities is widening.
- More than a million people in Scotland are now living in places where local environmental quality is declining more rapidly than the national average.

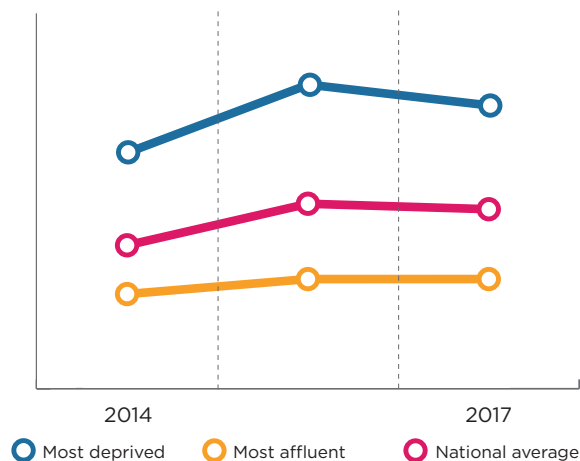
### % of sites with litter



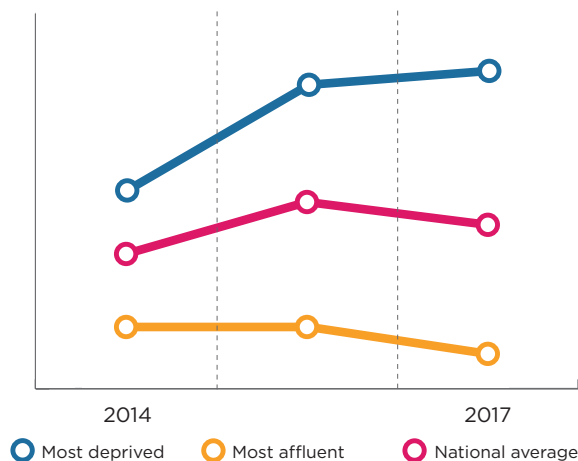
### % of sites with weeds



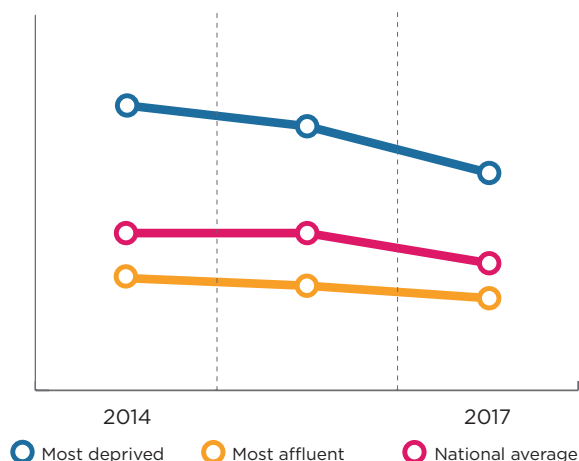
### % of sites with graffiti



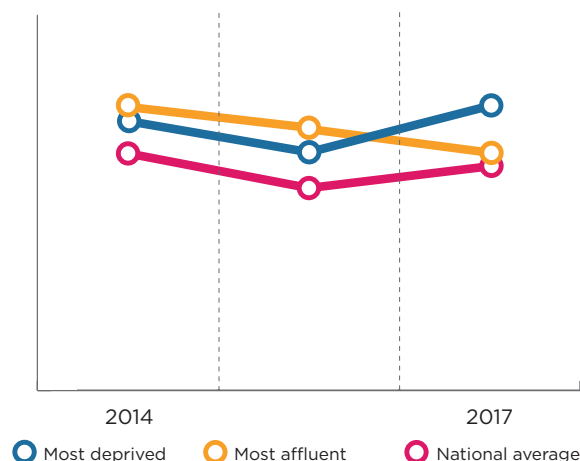
### % of sites with flytipping



% of sites with dog fouling



% of sites with detritus



The changes in the key indicators of local environmental quality nationally, in the most deprived and most affluent communities during 2014-2017 are illustrated in the table below.

Indicator	National average	Most deprived	Most affluent
Litter	↓	↓	↑
Flytipping	↓	↓	↑
Graffiti	↓	↓	↓
Weeds	↓	↓	↓
Detritus	↑	↓	↑
Dog fouling	↑	↑	↑

### A concern for communities

It is clear from our analysis of data from the Scottish Household Survey 2016 and local surveys undertaken by local authorities that the issue of poor environmental quality remains a matter of significant concern for local communities.

### Scottish Household Survey 2016

- Perceived prevalence of neighborhood problems varies by deprivation<sup>7</sup>, with those living in deprived areas reporting that they experience the effects of poor environmental quality more often than those from the most affluent areas.
- In 2016, just over three in ten adults (31%) in the 10 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland rated their neighbourhood as a very good place to live, compared to almost eight in ten (78%) of those living in the 10 per cent most affluent areas.

- There is a difference between adults in the 10 per cent most deprived and the 10 per cent most affluent areas in perceptions of rubbish or litter lying around (46% compared to 19%), animal nuisance such as noise or dog fouling (43% compared to 20%), vandalism/graffiti/damage to property (20% compared to 4%).

### Local Authority Resident Surveys

- In Glasgow, the top environmental issues identified were: litter (61%), chewing gum (58%), flyposting (38%), vandalism (37%) and graffiti (36%).
- In Fife, 73% of people said dog fouling was an issue in their neighborhood, with 70% saying flytipping is another important issue that needs dealt with.
- In North Ayrshire, 50% of people described dog fouling as a 'very or fairly big issue'.
- In West Dunbartonshire, litter and dog fouling were cited as the 'most common' anti-social behaviour problems.

<sup>7</sup>Scottish Household Survey. 2016. Scottish Household Survey. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/16002>.

# Articulating the wider impacts of decline

**We know that poor local environmental quality negatively impacts on individuals and communities.**

We also know poor local environmental quality is being experienced most severely in deprived communities.

There is a wealth of research which demonstrates the negative impact poor local environmental quality can have on the successful achievement of key policy outcomes and objectives across areas including health and wellbeing, education, criminal justice, the economy and tourism.



## Health and Wellbeing

- It is increasingly recognised that place and space have an impact on human health and wellbeing and that individual actions to improve lifestyle or health status are likely to be influenced by the environmental and socioeconomic context in which they take place".

Glasgow Centre for Population Health (2013) *The Built Environment and Health: An evidence review*.

- "...street level incivilities and perceived absence of environmental goods are related to health, with those who experience such incivilities being more likely to Report feelings of depression, anxiety and poor health".

A. Ellaway et al., (2009) *Associations between Health and Different Types of Environmental Incivility: A Scotland-Wide Study*. *Public Health* 123, no. 11.

- "Those who believed the environment in their neighbourhood is poor were more likely to report anxiety, depression and a generally poor state of health. They were less trustful of others, more resigned about difficulties in their area and more likely to live in fear of crime. People were more likely to express concern about, and be affected by, everyday street-level incivilities than they were about higher profile infrastructural features".

H. Burns, (2006) *The Chief Medical Officer's Report to the Scottish Ministers on the Health of the Nation*.

## Economy

- "Problems such as worklessness, low incomes, lack of aspiration and ill health are not just individual - they are also social. The environment can shape people's behaviour and limit or enhance their wellbeing and life chances, but this has largely been neglected in welfare policy".

Royal Town Planning Institute (2016) *Poverty, Place and Inequality*.

## Crime and perception of crime

- "...those who report high level of incivilities, and especially street level incivilities and absence of goods, are more likely to worry about their home being broken into or about being attacked in the street, while at the same time they are less likely to say that they feel very safe walking around in their local neighborhood".

Curtice et al (2005) *Public attitudes and Environmental Justice in Scotland*.

- "Dirt, decay, graffiti, litter and other signs of neglect of the environment (what criminologists call 'physical incivilities') are widely seen as drivers of fear."

Lorenc et al (2013) *Fear of crime and the environment: systematic review of UK qualitative evidence*, *BMC Public Health*.

## Education

- "Urban decay could easily impact upon pupils and their teachers. Pupils may demonstrate poor behaviour in the classroom, have low self-esteem, little appetite for educational attainment and have little cultural or social capital to draw on. Their teachers may become disillusioned and frustrated with their limited ability to teach in a community where crime and incivility is rife."

Perpetuity Research (2013) *One More Broken Window: The Impact of the Physical Environment on Schools*.

## Tourism

- "88% of Scottish adults believe that roadside litter creates a negative impression of Scotland"

YouGov Plc. (2016) Total sample size was 1000 adults. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Scottish adults (aged 18+).



# Consequences of decline in a social justice context

**We know that the condition of local communities matters hugely to people whether they live in cities, the countryside or somewhere in between. It affects everything from health and wellbeing, education, employment, the local economy, crime, how people feel about their area and, ultimately, the overall quality of the place they live.**

Currently, deprived communities are disproportionately impacted by poor local environmental quality.

Those living in areas of deprivation tend to have less exposure to the information, structures and resources which help to positively impact upon the quality of their local environment. Lack of exposure to the 'ways and means' of improving local environmental quality can contribute to the powerlessness and disillusionment of a community, thus hindering its ability to tackle a range of associated problems.

The inequality between Scotland's most deprived and most affluent communities will continue to grow if we do not take collective action to improve local environmental quality. The consequences of continuing decline are far reaching, from poorer health to weakened local economies, especially for those living in Scotland's most deprived communities.

That is why we believe poor local environmental quality needs to be considered a social justice issue.

At our recent stakeholder event, we brought together senior representatives from the public, private and third sectors, with a range of interests covering transport, tourism, business, environment, health, housing, criminal justice and community support and empowerment.

**Some of the key points from the discussion are listed below:**

- The importance of place - the combined physical, social and cultural environment has a hugely significant influence on health and health inequalities. Those living in areas of greater deprivation are less likely to experience the beneficial aspects of place and are more likely to be exposed to environmental factors that negatively impact on their health and wellbeing. Physical and social environments that nurture good health are fundamental to reducing health inequalities.

- Education, employment, poverty, poor physical and social environments are the real drivers or underlying causes of poor health and health inequality. This reinforces the need to drive up the quality of our environments, particularly those in the most deprived areas. If we fail, inequalities are likely to continue to widen.

- Nationally there has been a 2.4% reduction in the public perception of the crime rate, this reduction has not been replicated in deprived communities.

- Many visitors to Scotland witness poor local environmental quality as they travel on our road and rail network, and visit our industrial areas. These visitors, coming for business or pleasure, expect to see the Scotland we promote and portray. This is sometimes not the reality.

- We know that people choose not to visit or shop in a place that doesn't feel nice, and the same is true of a business; why would they choose to invest in a country that is not clean and green.

There was broad agreement from those participating in the event that they recognised and accepted the wider impacts of declining local environmental quality and would seek to identify and put in place practical actions that could be taken by their organisation individually, or with others, to support communities and change behaviours.

It was also agreed that communities themselves needed to be supported to explore the issues and design solutions and that the Community Empowerment Act and The Place Standard Tool both provided opportunities to do this.

# What needs to happen?

**Effectively addressing the decline in local environmental quality will not be straightforward or easy – it is being driven by a complex combination of political, social and economic factors including a lack of strategic priority and fragmented approach to tackling the problem, hard choices in relation to service delivery and public expenditure nationally and locally, changes in our consumption habits and unacceptable individual behaviours.**

However, we cannot keep neglecting this issue. As a society we all need to recognise that a failure to act now will not only hamper our collective ability to achieve successful outcomes in key policy areas such as health and wellbeing, education, criminal justice the economy and tourism. It will also have long-term consequences for our most deprived communities and Scotland's ambition to be a socially just society.

This means at a local and national level, local environmental quality needs to be given strategic priority and integrated across a number of policy areas. Improving environmental quality in communities across Scotland is fundamental to reducing inequality, and will have positive impacts for individuals, communities and, economic and social prosperity.

Proactive national and local leadership to raise the profile of local environmental quality, enhanced collaboration across the public, private and third sectors, and, increased empowerment of local communities are all more relevant than ever.

## **More can and should be done to ensure there is:**

- Focused national and local leadership on local environmental quality.
- More coordinated activity across sectors with actions to tackle the decline in local environmental quality reflected in organisational plans and objectives.
- Recognition of the challenges posed by poor local environmental quality, particularly in our most deprived communities.
- Increased support for, and empowerment of, communities to identify the issues that matter most locally and to build capacity to act and reverse the decline in our most deprived areas.
- Access to information for communities and the means to participate in decisions which affect the quality of their local environments.
- Support for long-term research into the drivers of poor local environmental quality and the impact it can have on achieving positive outcomes in other policy areas.

“We all have a responsibility to actively participate in this shared endeavour. Successful, thriving communities are characterised by streets, parks and open spaces that are clean and safe, places that people want to spend their time. Supporting the transformation of communities with poor local environmental quality has the power to dramatically improve people's quality of life”.

Derek A. Robertson - Chief Executive, Keep Scotland Beautiful









We support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keep Scotland Beautiful is the charity that campaigns, acts and educates on a range of local, national and global environmental issues to change behaviour and improve the quality of people's lives and the places they care for. We are committed to making Scotland clean, green and sustainable.



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