

**Ofwat PC report:  
Working with  
communities to  
improve bathing  
water experience**



**Wessex Water**  
YTL GROUP

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# Working with communities to improve bathing water experience

## 1 Executive Summary

### 1.1 Purpose of this report

This report is the Wessex Water Executive Summary of the Evaluation Report completed by the Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset Team in April 2025. The AMP7 Performance Commitment required an evaluation report to be completed once during the 5-year period to assess the benefits resulting from this performance commitment. An independent evaluation report was undertaken by a placement student from Cardiff University, employed by the Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset Project over a 9-month period for this purpose.

### 1.2 The performance commitment

This performance commitment entitled: *“Working with community projects to deliver bathing water amenity”* was developed in collaboration with the Wessex Water Catchment Panel to support the PR19 Business Plan delivered between 2020 and 2025. This was a bespoke environmental performance commitment (PC) where progress was reported annually on activities undertaken during the preceding calendar year. The PC contributed to Table 3B within the Annual Performance Review reporting to Ofwat following confirmation of delivery levels by the Catchment Panel, in accordance with the method statement.

The purpose of this PC is to incentivise the company to work with community groups and stakeholders to deliver amenity improvements to bathing water locations. The intended benefits are to improve enjoyment of bathing water areas. The PC set targets to be achieved annually relating to bathing water locations where projects had been implemented to aid the amenity value of the beach.

Projects were delivered in partnership and primarily led by two specific projects: Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset (LFCSS) and Litter Free Dorset (LFD). In a small number of cases, Wessex Water led the project delivery with wider partners and stakeholders at non-designated bathing waters.

The PC incurred a financial penalty where the target number of projects delivered at bathing waters was missed and attracted a reward where a greater number of locations were achieved. The number of projects delivered was presented, typically by the two key project partners, to the Catchment Panel on an annual basis.

The PC method statement highlights that there were 49 designated bathing waters included within the Wessex Water area, where the 47 were included in the PC. Fourteen locations (bathing waters) were included as a baseline level, where activities were underway prior to the start of the PC in 2020

or were subject to an Enforcement Undertaking. The delivery profile and targets are illustrated in Table 1 below, indicating the cumulative number of locations to be delivered annually from 2020 to 2025.

*Table 1 - Performance Commitment delivery profile*

| Number of beaches with engaged community |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|  | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25 |
| Performance commitment                   | 14      | 20      | 26      | 33      | 40      | 47      |

## 2 Performance Commitment delivery

The performance commitment required delivery of sustainable projects at designated bathing waters across the Wessex Water region and enabled provision for project delivery at popular but undesignated locations.

During AMP7 there has been an increased public focus on bathing water designation in terms of the process for designation and the quality of those beaches designated. During the AMP, one coastal bathing water (Burnham Jetty) has been de-designated and three inland (river) bathing waters have been designated.

In recognition of the increased public focus on bathing waters, Wessex Water undertook a number of investigations and trials at designated and non-designated locations to improve data and understanding of water quality at time of use. These locations have been included in this PC and supported by the Catchment Panel.

Actions delivered by the Litter Free Dorset and Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset projects have focussed on engagement activities with visitors, residents, businesses and schools within the vicinity of these bathing waters. Projects have typically involved the development of resources for schools and businesses to better understand risks to bathing water and beach quality, this has tended to focus on littering, dog fouling and housekeeping practices to reduce vermin (including seagulls). Work with visitors and residents has involved artwork conveying key messages around responsible water management, surface water drainage, littering and enabling water refill stations to reduce risks of plastic pollution. A key theme has been positive education and learning, providing easy and interactive resources to help raise public awareness.

### 2.1 Key findings

#### a) Litter Reduction & Management

- LFD Projects (e.g., Beach Toy Library, Angling Line Recycling Bins, Signage) led to visible reductions in litter at high-traffic sites like Durdle Door and Weymouth.
- LFCSS Projects (e.g., Dog Fouling Campaigns, 2-Minute Litter Pick Boards) were effective in targeting specific litter types and engaging local communities.
- Community interviews consistently rated litter as a minor issue, with average concern scores below 4/10 across all sites.

#### b) Community Engagement

- Both LFD and LFCSS successfully fostered local ownership of environmental issues.
- Initiatives like the Coastal Champions Awards and Beach Care Groups empowered schools and volunteers, especially in Somerset.
- Stakeholders praised the projects for building trust and collaboration between residents, councils, and businesses.

#### c) Behaviour Change & Awareness

- Behavioural signage (e.g., “99% take their litter – will you?”) was cited as highly effective.
- However, awareness of LFD/LFCSS branding was low among tourists, despite high support once informed.
- Tourism-related litter remains a challenge, especially during peak seasons.

All projects delivered, whether by Wessex Water or our partners, have demonstrated endurance to deliver improvements over multiple years and facilitate changes in behaviour for the benefit of the beach and bathing water environment and usage.

This collaboration has outperformed the original performance commitment target of 47 bathing waters, delivering sustainable actions at 54 sites across the region.

The remainder of this report is the Executive Summary to the full evaluation report prepared by Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset on behalf of Wessex Water.

## 2.2 Litter Free Evaluation Report: Evaluating the Litter Free Initiatives 2020 – 2025

### 2.2.1 Wessex Water's Bathing Water Commitment

Wessex Water's 2020 bespoke environmental performance commitment, E6: Working with Communities to Improve Bathing Water Experience<sup>1</sup>, focuses on enhancing the bathing water experience by increasing the number of beaches with active community initiatives each year.

This commitment goes beyond the company's statutory obligations under the Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC) and aligns with the goals set out in the PR19 Final Determinations. Projects delivered are monitored through the Performance Commitment PR19WSX\_E6 Working with Communities to Improve Bathing Water Experience (E6). This report covers project delivery information spanning 2020-2024 to evaluate the impact of the Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset (LFCSS) and Litter Free Dorset (LFD) projects.

### 2.2.2 Purpose of the evaluation report

This report evaluates the projects implemented by LFD and LFCSS between 2020 and 2025 across selected bathing areas in Dorset and Somerset. These initiatives aimed to reduce litter, enhance community engagement, improve bathing water quality, and raise awareness of local environmental issues. Through an extensive assessment, the report examines the effectiveness of these efforts in achieving these objectives across the designated sites. Understanding the impact of these initiatives is crucial for shaping future environmental strategies and ensuring the long-term sustainability of these coastal areas.

### 2.2.3 Scope of the report

This report provides an evaluation of thirty-seven bathing sites across Dorset and Somerset, with a more in-depth focus on six bathing areas in Dorset and five in Somerset (Table 2). The remaining twenty-six sites were assessed with less detail. For the primary sites, a range of data collection methods were employed, including: community and stakeholder interviews; litter weight data; and beach survey results to carry out an in-depth evaluation of the impact of the project. These data serve as the foundation for analysing the impact, successes and challenges of the projects in achieving their intended outcomes. Additionally, the report incorporates reflections from both the LFD and LFCSS teams, as well as input from external stakeholders within related organisations, regarding the delivery of the Litter Free projects in both Somerset and Dorset. This approach offers a comprehensive view of the projects over the past five years, highlighting successes, challenges, and opportunities for future improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> [PR19-final-determinations-Wessex-Water---Outcomes-performance-commitment-appendix.pdf](#)

Table 2 - Focussed Dorset and Somerset sites

| Dorset                    | Somerset       |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Lulworth Cove/Durdle Door | Burnham-on-Sea |
| Whitley Lake              | Minehead       |
| Shore Road                | Porlock        |
| Weymouth Central          | Dunster        |
| Ringstead Bay             | Blue Anchor    |
| Church Ope Cove           |                |

## 2.2.4 Overview of the Litter Free Dorset Projects

With a variety of initiatives launched across the six focused Litter Free Dorset (LFD) bathing areas, the evaluation process noted that some received more recognition and discussion than others. Stakeholders frequently highlighted specific projects for their positive impact on reducing beach litter, fostering community engagement and raising awareness. The initiatives most consistently mentioned across all sites included:

- Beach Toy Library
- Angling Line Recycling Bin
- Signage
- Artwork Messaging

### 2.2.4.1 The impact of LFD initiatives in litter management and reduction

Community interviews conducted across all six focused sites consistently indicated that litter is not perceived as a significant concern in local bathing areas, with participants commonly ranking it as a minor issue. When asked to rate the extent of the litter problem on a scale from 1 (no issue) to 10 (a major issue), even Church Ope (the site with the highest average score) only reached 3.5. This reinforces the overall low public concern regarding litter presence at these Dorset sites.

Additionally, stakeholder interviews consistently highlight improvements in litter management across these areas, often attributing progress to LFD's initiatives. Many stakeholders referenced LFD's overall impact or specific projects that have contributed to positive change. For instance, the Lulworth Education Ranger emphasized a noticeable reduction in litter since the launch of LFD projects, stating, "Since the campaigns started with LFD, the real tough challenges we had with litter at Durdle Door have decreased." Similarly, at Weymouth Central, stakeholders frequently cited the positive impact of initiatives such as the Beach Toy Library. This theme emerged eight times across interviews, with statements like, "I think the beach toy library has really helped in reducing litter." These findings reflect a strong perception among stakeholders that LFD's projects have led to tangible improvements in litter reduction and management.



## 3 Overview of the Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset Projects

Across the five selected focused sites in Somerset, the interviews and data showed a wide spread of themes and impacts regarding Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset (LFCSS) projects. Many of the LFCSS initiatives were mentioned throughout the stakeholder interviews conducted. Key initiatives across the bathing sites include:

- Angling Line Recycling Bin
- Beach Toy Library
- 2-minute Litter Pick Board
- Dog Fouling Campaign
- Coastal Champions Awards

### 3.1 LFCSS Projects promoting community engagement

A key success of the LFCSS initiatives has been their ability to build stronger community engagement, with various projects effectively bringing local residents together to take collective action to improve the local environment. One standout example is the Angling Line Recycling Bin, which received frequent praise from stakeholders across the sites. This initiative was found not only to have made a significant impact in reducing angling-related litter but also demonstrated high levels of community involvement. The initiative's success was illustrated by the Somerset Council Assistant Harbour Master, who shared that “over 20 kilograms of fishing line has been collected from the bins”, highlighting both the initiative's effectiveness and the community's commitment to reducing beach litter.

In addition to the Angling Line Recycling Bin, other initiatives, such as the Coastal Champions Awards, further contributed to community engagement by improving local awareness and encouraging active participation. Stakeholders, such as the Dunster Beach Holidays Manager, highlighted the positive impact of these awards, emphasising their role in educating children. This educational focus not only raised awareness of environmental issues but also provided children with opportunities to engage in activities that encourage positive behaviours towards litter management and their local environment.

While initiatives such as the Beach Toy Library, 2-Minute Litter Pick Board and Dog Fouling Campaign were mentioned less frequently, although they were also acknowledged for their role in addressing specific litter-related concerns in the community. Together, these projects have created a sense of local responsibility, which is essential for effectively managing local litter and water quality in a local community.

### 3.2 Reflections of the Litter Free Teams and related stakeholders

Reflections from both the LFD and LFCSS Coordinators provide valuable insight into the internal perspectives of these initiatives. Both Coordinators highlighted the central importance of community engagement, suggesting that building trust and fostering local ownership has been key to the success of the projects. In particular, the LFD Coordinator reflected on the organisation's role as a



connector, bringing together communities, local authorities and funders to make environmental action more accessible and collaborative. This indicates that enabling communities and creating convenient systems for sustainable behaviour have been core strategies for both Litter Free projects.

The LFCSS Coordinator's reflections suggest that growing trust among local communities has led to stronger grassroots participation, with residents increasingly contributing their own ideas and taking ownership of projects. Both sets of reflections point to broader impacts beyond litter reduction, suggesting that the initiatives have strengthened community ties and helped people develop a deeper emotional connection to their local coastline. This connection is seen as vital for promoting long-term environmental stewardship among the project communities.

Additionally, reflections from two external stakeholders, a Director at Wessex Water and an Area Environment Manager from the Environment Agency, provide valuable insight into the broader impact of Litter Free projects from those who have observed them over the past five years. Although not directly involved in delivery, both stakeholders have closely followed the initiatives and their reflections offer independent perspectives on the progress and challenges faced.

A consistent theme across both reflections was the effectiveness of creativity and community engagement in driving awareness. The use of art, storytelling and locally tailored engagement activities has been successful in making messages about litter and waste resonate more personally with communities, fostering stronger local responsibility.

Both stakeholders also highlighted the challenge of changing behaviours, suggesting that long-term commitment and consistent messaging are essential for embedding environmental responsibility. Quick fixes are unlikely to have a lasting impact, instead, gradual and sustained engagement is needed to influence habits effectively.

Additionally, the value of having an independent organisation such as the Litter Free groups coordinating efforts was emphasised. Their neutral position and experience across multiple sites were seen as key to ensuring credibility, consistency, and effective delivery.

Finally, reflections suggest that these projects have successfully sparked local conversations, as seen in the growing discussions among residents, visitors, and businesses. This indicates that Litter Free initiatives have not only raised awareness but are also helping to embed positive environmental behaviours within the community.

## 4 Identified challenges and opportunities for growth

### 4.1 Key challenges

A key concern was the negative impact of tourism, with seasonal visitor peaks contributing to increased litter and placing strain on local efforts. As one stakeholder commented, “a lot of the litter left is probably left by tourists”, suggesting that managing the environmental effects of tourism remains a persistent challenge.

Another prominent theme was the lack of public education and awareness around littering, bathing water quality and wider environmental issues. While existing initiatives have made progress, knowledge gaps continue to limit the full potential for behaviour change.

In addition, shifting people’s behaviours and mindsets towards littering was consistently highlighted as a significant barrier. Stakeholders acknowledged that ingrained habits and attitudes are difficult to change, making it challenging to achieve lasting improvements without sustained and creative interventions.

### 4.2 Opportunities for growth

These challenges present valuable opportunities for development. Placing greater emphasis on initiatives aimed at tourists visiting the project area could help to address visitor-related pressures through tailored interventions and targeted awareness campaigns. Introducing additional educational campaigns would help close existing knowledge gaps and empower communities to take greater ownership of environmental issues. Finally, expanding and concentrating efforts on behaviour-focused initiatives, such as the successful behavioural signage at Lulworth, could further reduce litter, especially during peak season.

## 5 Conclusions

The Litter Free Dorset (LFD) and Litter Free Coast and Sea Somerset (LFCSS) initiatives have demonstrated significant success in raising awareness, reducing litter and fostering stronger community engagement across key coastal sites. By leveraging creative and impactful projects such as the Angling Line Recycling Bins, the Beach Toy Library and the Coastal Champions Awards, these initiatives have proven effective in promoting long-term environmental responsibility and community participation. Stakeholder and community feedback reflects the positive impact of these efforts, particularly in terms of litter reduction and the cultivation of a deeper connection to local environments.

However, the evaluation also identified several challenges, particularly regarding the seasonal influx of tourists, the need for more comprehensive education and the difficulty of changing long-standing behaviours related to littering. Despite these hurdles, opportunities for growth remain. Focused interventions targeting tourists, enhanced educational campaigns and the expansion of successful behaviour-focused strategies, such as the behavioural signage at Lulworth, offer pathways for continued improvement.

Ultimately, the LFD and LFCSS projects have set a solid foundation for future progress and have successfully achieved their objectives. With ongoing collaboration, sustained engagement and targeted initiatives, these programmes have the potential to drive lasting behavioural change and improve the environmental quality of Dorset and Somerset's coastal areas.