

Abandoned Vehicles

Committee name	Residents' Services Select Committee
Officer reporting	Joanne Howells, Service Manager, Anti-Social Behaviour Team
Papers with report	Nil
Ward	All

HEADLINES

To provide an overview of the reporting and investigation process for abandoned vehicles by Hillingdon Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Residents' Services Select Committee notes the contents of the report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

In the UK, there is no single statutory definition of an "abandoned vehicle," but guidance from the Government, and legislation, such as the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, provide criteria and procedures for identifying and dealing with them.

1. The Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 s3, 4 and 5 (as amended by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005) places a duty and powers on Councils to remove motor vehicles abandoned on land in the open air (including private land) and roads (including private roads) and the Council can recover costs from either the owner (unless it was stolen) or the person who abandoned it. The definition of motor vehicles includes trailers.
2. Hillingdon Council does not have the powers to deal with the following:
 - Untaxed vehicle(s) – not abandoned on the highway – Responsibility of the DVLA
 - Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN) declared vehicles on the highway – DVLA
 - Vehicles without a current MOT – DVLA/Police
 - Vehicles with no insurance – Police
3. A designated officer appointed by a local authority can decide whether a vehicle is abandoned and should consider the key indicators (as per GOV.UK guidance) when making this decision. There is no single legal definition of an abandoned vehicle; however, if it remains in the same position for 2 months or more and is untaxed (Class B), or seriously damaged, burnt out, wrecked or missing number plates (Class A) then Hillingdon Council may consider it as abandoned. Factors which indicate a vehicle may be abandoned include:

- The vehicle is untaxed
- No registered keeper
- Stationary for a significant amount of time
- Significantly damaged, run down or unroadworthy, for example has flat tyres, missing wheels, or broken windows
- The vehicle is burnt out
- Missing number plate

An authorised officer can legally enter land (at a reasonable time) to investigate and remove abandoned vehicles.

4. Abandoned vehicles fall within two classifications each of which have separate legal and procedural processes.

Class A – Taxed or untaxed with significant damage, wreck, burnt out:

Enquiries are made as to whether it is subject of a Police enquiry or insurance claim (accident). If not, an officer will visit, take photographs, and submit for immediate removal for destruction with the Council's collection agent.



Class B - Untaxed, unregistered, stationary for a period of 30 days, lacking one or more number plates, contains waste.

An officer will visit the location, may affix a Notice to the vehicle, take photographs and submit information for DVLA enquiries. If a registered keeper is identified, a letter of notification is sent with a request to remove the vehicle within 7 days. If there is no response to either the affixed notice or letter, removal will be arranged, and the vehicle stored for 31 days. If the vehicle is not claimed, it is then destroyed.

5. If a Class A or B vehicle is abandoned on private land, a private driveway or within the boundary of a property an officer will confirm the landowner and draft a statutory notice stating the Council's intention to remove the vehicle. On expiration of the notice, and provided no appeal or objections are received, details will be submitted for DVLA enquiries to ascertain registered keeper's details. The process for Class B vehicles is then followed.
6. DVLA enquiries can only be requested under specific criteria and subject to sufficient evidence. The evidence must be retained and made available for DVLA audit purposes. The Council must satisfy the DVLA that the motor vehicle is left without authority on any land in the open air, or any land forming part of the public roads or highway. An officer must visit the location to verify that the vehicle is or appears to be abandoned and take photographs of the vehicle in situ.
7. When the officer is satisfied that the vehicle is or appears to be abandoned, an enquiry can be made with DVLA to confirm vehicle keeper details. The report must contain:
 - Date/time/location
 - Make/model details
 - Registration number
 - Formal report by the investigating officer
 - Photographic evidence of the vehicle
8. Authorised Council officers may issue a fixed penalty notice (FPN) up to £200 if there is sufficient evidence to support and prove the offence of wilful abandonment. If prosecuted at Court, offender(s) may be fined up to £2500 and/or be sentenced to up to 3 months imprisonment. Police can also seize vehicles under separate powers, particularly if linked to anti-social behaviour or illegal use.
9. There are legal difficulties when dealing with the enforcement of abandoned vehicles, for example
 - Notice requirements on private land – must provide 15 days' notice to the landowner or occupier before removing a vehicle from private land.
 - If the landowner/occupier objects during this period, the local authority cannot proceed with removal.
 - Cost-prohibitive removals – local authorities are not required to remove a vehicle if the cost of moving it to the nearest highway is excessive, such as when specialist equipment is required.
 - Owner notification – if the vehicle is not fit for immediate destruction, the Council must attempt to identify and contact the registered keeper via DVLA and issue a 7-day notice to the owner before disposal. These steps can be delayed if ownership is unclear or DVLA records are outdated.
 - There is no statutory definition, so officers must assess based on indicators, as outlined in paragraph 2 of this report. The subjective assessment can lead to

delays, especially in borderline cases or where complaints are contested.

- Legal risk and liability concerns – local authorities must ensure procedural compliance to avoid legal challenges from vehicle owners or landowners. Errors in notice period or premature disposal can expose the Council to legal liability.

10. The primary factors contributing to the abandonment of vehicles within the Borough are

- a. Mechanical failure/un-roadworthiness.
- b. Legal non-compliance – vehicles without tax, mot or insurance, abandonment to avoid fines or enforcement action.
- c. Ownership and registration issues – no registered keeper on DVLA database, vehicles left behind by previous owners, after property evictions or repossessions.
- d. Financial hardship – owners unable to afford repairs, insurance or disposal costs.
- e. Intentional dumping – vehicles left deliberately to avoid disposal fees, or linked to criminal activity such as fly tipping, theft or drug use.
- f. Misuse of public space – vehicles left on the highway for extended period for repair or sale.

RESIDENT BENEFIT

11. Between 2020 and 2025, many local authorities reported a consistent rise in the number of abandoned vehicles. This trend is particularly prevalent in urban areas and areas with higher levels of low-income households. The cost of living and rising costs of fuel, insurance, mot and repairs, etc. lead to some owners abandoning vehicles they can no longer afford to maintain or operate.

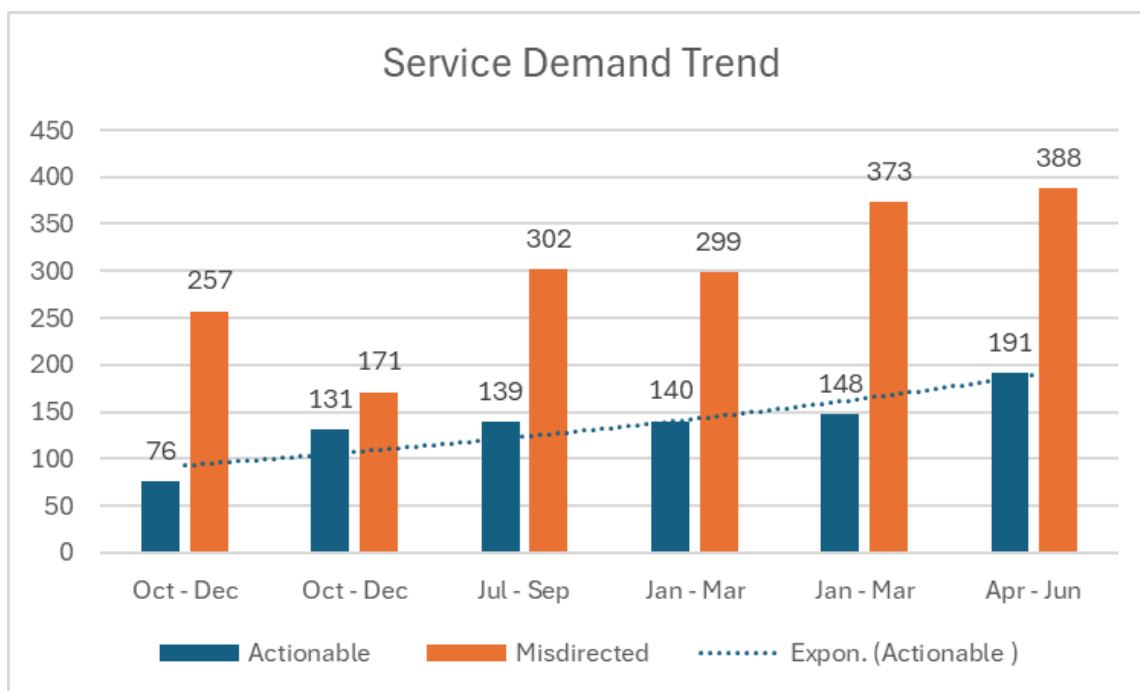
12. In densely populated areas, vehicles are often abandoned which contributes to a visual impact and anti-social behaviour. They are often used for informal storage of waste and habitation, which further complicates removal.

13. The emerging trends are environmental, public safety and criminal use. Usual areas identified as hot spots include:

- Social Housing estates
- Industrial zones
- Areas with high tenant turnover

14. Hillingdon Council has reported a year-on-year increase in the number of abandoned vehicle reports, with over 50% reported incorrectly or misdirected. However, there is a lack of standardised reporting across London Boroughs making comparative analysis with reports and performance in Hillingdon difficult.

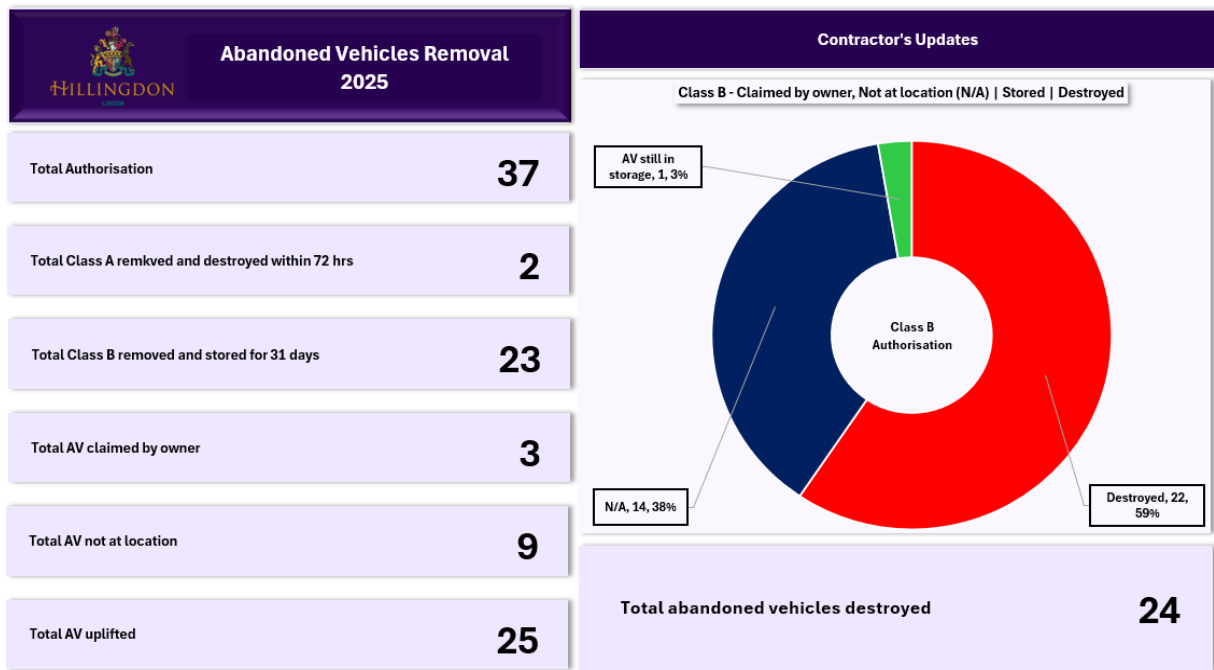
Date	Actionable reports	Misdirected	Totals
Oct – Dec 23	131	171	301
Jan- Dec 24	546	1246	1792
Jan – Jun 25	339	761	1,100



15. All boroughs rely on public reporting tools and visual indicators, such as flat tyres, damage and missing plates to assess abandonment. Some utilise and have integrated ANPR within an abandoned vehicle enforcement strategy, enabling real time identification of untaxed/unregistered vehicles, targeting removals based on DVLA and Police data and enabling proactive enforcement. This supports intelligence led operations and mapping hot spot areas. However, Hillingdon does not utilise or have integrated access to ANPR with this capability.
16. Hillingdon Council is developing the use of GIS mapping to identify hot spot areas and introducing a reporting app, Love Clean Streets, to assist residents in reporting environmental issues, to enhance proactive enforcement and community engagement. This will allow officers to track trends and inform policy and operational decisions.
17. Disposal methods and recycling – Vehicles reported as abandoned, removed by Council's contractors and considered in a usable condition are stored for 31 days before disposal. The West London Waste Authority is the Council's authorised treatment facility for destruction and/or recycling.
18. Costs for removal and destruction are based on vehicle type, condition and recovery complexity. As of April 2023, statutory charges set under the Removal, Storage and Disposal of vehicles (Prescribed Sums and Charges) Regulations:

	Removal Fee	Storage (per day)	Disposal Fee
Standard Car (under 3.5t)	£150	£20	£75
Larger vehicles (HGV's)	£200-£350	£25-£35	£100-£150

19. The number of vehicles reported and removed for 2025, detailed below:



Triage and Verification

- All reports are triaged at the point of receipt to ensure they meet defined criteria for investigation.
- Only cases with clear signs of abandonment and viable investigative leads (e.g. DVLA traceable) are assigned to officers.

Response and Timeframes

- Officers aim to inspect priority cases as soon as practicably possible, depending on urgency and location.
- Legal notice periods apply:
 - 7 days for vehicles with identifiable owners
 - 15 days for vehicles on private land

23. Between October 2024 and July 2025, the ASB Team issued 3 FPNs for wilful abandonment of vehicles on a public highway. The low number of FPNs is primarily due to difficulties in identifying the registered owner or keeper. Many vehicles are left unregistered or sold without updating DVLA records. Without a confirmed owner or clear evidence of abandonment, FPNs cannot be legally issued, as they must be supported by sufficient evidence to withstand potential. Court prosecution and a vehicle with no registered keeper or clear ownership status poses legal challenges and limits recovery of costs for vehicle removal and storage.

24. Officers invest considerable time inspecting vehicles that ultimately cannot be actioned due to lack of ownership or evidential deficiencies. Repeated DVLA checks, site visits and documentation efforts divert resources from other enforcement priorities. Low FPN issuance rates may reduce the perceived effectiveness of the service which may cause public frustration where residents are reporting vehicles repeatedly without a visible resolution.

25. There are alternative reporting tools and agencies who deal with reports that do not fall within the remit of this service, such as

- Reporting an untaxed vehicle through [GOV.UK](https://gov.uk). To establish that it is untaxed can be done using the [government's free vehicle tax checker](#) or contact with Enforcement Section, W070/DIZ, DVLA, Longview Road, Swansea, SA7 0XZ.
- Reporting a vehicle with no MOT - The government has a free [MOT checker](#) that allows residents to check the MOT status of a vehicle. This should then be reported to the Police.
- Reporting an uninsured vehicle – this can be checked using the [askMID website](#) and then should be reported to the Police.

If a car is taxed, MOT'd, insured and breaking no parking rules it can stay on a public highway indefinitely.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil.

APPENDICES

Nil.