

Hannah Blythyn AC/AM
Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd
Minister for Environment



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref HB/00978/18

David John Rowlands AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Government.Committee.Business@gov.wales

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David,

Thank you for your letter of 15 August to the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs regarding Petition P-05-839, in which British Heart Foundation Cymru is calling for the adoption of World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines into Welsh law and the introduction of a new Clean Air Act for Wales. I am responding as this matter falls within my Ministerial portfolio.

Improving air quality is a key priority in the Welsh Government's 'national strategy: Prosperity for All' and it is, likewise, a key portfolio priority for me. Outdoor air quality in Wales has, on the whole, improved over recent decades. This has been largely due to controls on emissions of pollutants from power stations, industry, including agriculture, transport and domestic sources. However, problems persist and pose considerable risks to public health in parts of Wales.

This summer the Welsh Government established a Clean Air Programme. The aim of the Programme is to reduce the burden of poor air on human health and the natural environment, and also the requirement to comply with European and domestic legislative obligations. The Programme will develop and co-ordinate actions across all Government Departments and sectors to reduce emissions and deliver improvements in air quality. Detail of action to improve air quality in Wales, will be included in a Clean Air Plan for Wales, which we intend to publish for consultation next year. We already have access to a wide range of levers to take forward action needed to improve air quality. These include planning, infrastructure, legislation, regulation and communication measures. If the Programme identifies gaps, I will develop new legislation where appropriate to fix this.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Hannah.Blythyn@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Hannah.Blythyn@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

My views on the specific proposals for a new Clean Air Act for Wales are set out below.

- *Ensure that WHO guidelines on air pollution are observed by Welsh law.*

Protecting public health is a key commitment for me. One of the main objectives of the new National Emission Ceilings Directive is to narrow the gap between current levels of air pollution and WHO guideline levels by reducing emissions of 5 important air pollutants. The pollutants include ammonia, nitrogen oxides, non-methane volatile organic compounds, fine particulate matter and sulphur dioxide. Since 2011, the UK has met all European Union (EU) and international emission reduction commitments. The Welsh Government will set out its plans to help achieve the UK's future emission reduction commitments for the 5 pollutants within the UK National Air Pollution Control Programme which will be published before 1 April 2019.

In addition, the Clean Air Programme recognises that while compliance with relevant standards is the immediate priority, air quality improvement in Wales must reach beyond this in order to protect and improve health and wellbeing in the longer-term. My officials are assessing practical aspects, such as the economic, technical, political and social impacts, of adopting and attaining the WHO guidelines for air pollution in Wales. Any future targets need to be underpinned by evidence to ensure they deliver the most effective change, supporting the delivery of our well-being goals.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) recently consulted on a new independent statutory body to hold government to account on environmental objectives once the UK has left the EU. My officials are working with Defra to understand the potential implications of this approach in relation to future policy and legislative developments in Wales.

- *Introduce charging Clean Air Zones in areas which are in breach or close to the limits for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter and ring-fence the funds for further improvements to air quality.*

I recognise the potential for Clean Air Zones to bring about real improvements in air quality, raising the profile of air quality issues and acting as an impetus to behaviour-change. Clean Air Zones can provide a range of responses to meet the challenge of improving air quality in areas where evidence shows that urgent and concerted action is required to meet legislative requirements on pollutant limits and our wider aspirations for sustainable development and the well-being of future generations.

Earlier this year we consulted on a draft Clean Air Zone Framework for Wales. The Framework set Welsh policy in this area in the context of public health, setting out that Clean Air Zones should provide for co-ordinated action to deliver a significant reduction in public and environmental exposure to harmful airborne pollutants from all sources. We intend to publish the Framework by the end of 2018.

Any local authority in Wales may introduce a Clean Air Zone in order to address local air quality issues, whether as a result of identified legal exceedences or as part of a health improvement programme to address poor air quality. Currently there is no specific legal requirement for local authorities to introduce a Clean Air Zone. Local knowledge is vital to finding air quality solutions that are suited to local areas and the communities and businesses affected. Local characteristics can affect local levels of pollution and national modelling will not pick up all of the necessary local detail. The size of the exceedance can also vary according to local circumstances. A leading role for local authorities responsible for roads which are non-compliant is essential.

Where statutory nitrogen dioxide limit values are being exceeded, we require local authorities to develop innovative plans to address this.

In Wales, Caerphilly County Borough Council and Cardiff Council are responsible for addressing the exceedance of limit values at a number of locations in their respective authority areas. These exceedances are projected to continue for several years unless action is taken. I have directed both authorities to undertake feasibility studies to identify the option that will deliver urgent compliance. Unless Cardiff City Council identifies an alternative measure (or measures) which would bring the roads for which they are responsible into compliance with statutory limits at least as quickly as a charging Clean Air Zone, I will require, by Direction, Cardiff City Council to introduce a charging Clean Air Zone. The timescales that I have set the authorities are extremely demanding, and my officials are providing support to ensure that this work progresses efficiently. The Welsh Government has allocated over £20 million for an Air Quality Fund through to 2021 to help accelerate compliance with nitrogen dioxide limits and improve air quality in Wales.

As part of our work to develop a Clean Air Plan for Wales, we are working with relevant stakeholders to consider the opportunities presented by the implementation of Clean Air Zones and how they should be integrated with wider Government policies.

- *Ensure that infrastructure and technology is in place to facilitate increased uptake of Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles and public transport.*

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport recently provided (11 October 2018) a written statement on the deployment of £2 million funding for electric charging points.

The funding will be used to help create a publicly accessible national network of rapid charging points, enabling electric vehicles to undertake longer journeys. The focus will be on locations on or near our strategic road network, with a particular emphasis on North-South and East-West journeys. This work will complement the funding packages implemented by the Office for Low Emission Vehicles for the On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme, Workplace Charging Scheme, and Electric vehicle Homecharge scheme.

Part of the funding will support scoping work to ensure that the charging infrastructure is deployed in the most effective and cost efficient manner. This will include establishing network specifications, power availability and opportunities for utilising local renewable energy.

- *Invest in improved monitoring of pollution across Wales, and ensure that information on the risks to health is available to vulnerable groups.*

Local authorities are responsible for managing air pollution in their areas as part of the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) regime, established under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995. The Welsh Government has issued extensive statutory guidance setting out what is expected of local authorities in fulfilling their LAQM duties. This includes monitoring and annual reporting on air quality in their area. Annual reports use a template designed by the Welsh Government, in consultation with local authorities and Public Health Wales. The template is intended to inform members of the public about air pollution in their area, the actions that are being taken to improve it and what they can do to contribute.

With regards to air quality monitoring, local authorities must take a risk-based approach to the assessment and monitoring of local air quality, focusing on locations where members of the public are likely to be exposed to excessive levels of air pollution. Some of the monitors used by local authorities for LAQM purposes offer real-time reporting which ensures information on levels of pollution are immediately available, allowing people to take action to avoid it where possible. This can be accessed, along with information from National and UK-wide monitoring networks on the Air Quality in Wales website. The website also provides an air pollution forecast tool and related public health advice

Our LAQM guidance for local authorities also recognises schools, care homes, hospitals, nurseries and active travel routes, amongst others, as “sensitive receptor locations”. For example, highlighting the significant contribution made by the ‘school run’ to levels of air pollution and traffic congestion on roads and the potential for schools to help educate children and parents on the issues around air quality and explore potential solutions.

As part of the work required to underpin the Clean Air Programme and future Government policy, we are working with partners to provide the right evidence bases in Wales. To take this work forward, the Welsh Government has developed an Evidence, Innovation and Improvements Project. The project aims to complement existing evidence on airborne pollution with timely and more local evidence where it is needed, to enable better targeted actions and policies in Wales. This will involve assessing priority areas for action, including at sensitive receptor locations such as schools and hospitals, and collecting new evidence where it is necessary. The work will aim to enhance collaboration between stakeholders to help drive and evaluate air pollution reduction interventions, enabling a culture of prevention rather than mitigation.

I welcome innovative solutions to improve the assessment of air quality across Wales. As new technologies evolve, applications will arise which bring new insight to air pollution issues and we will review this through the Evidence, Innovation and Improvements project.

With regards to ensuring information on the risk to health is available to vulnerable groups, we are currently developing awareness raising and behavioural change communications, as part of the wider Clean Air Plan for Wales. This will be underpinned by evidence, which raises awareness of the issues and encourages a model shift for people using their cars where there are viable alternatives. Emphasis will be placed on those interventions that address interconnected problems and can deliver multiple benefits, such as promoting and facilitating active travel. As part of the Clean Air Plan we will be reviewing the current LAQM regime to determine whether it can be improved.

- *Increase public awareness of the impact of domestic wood burning and the steps which can be taken to minimise this.*

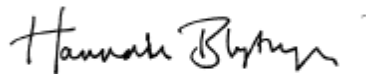
Work on domestic combustion policy is an integral part of the Clean Air Programme. A multifaceted approach is required to ensure the use of the cleanest domestic appliances and fuels used to burn and the ongoing maintenance requirements of such appliances. Success in this area can only be achieved by raising awareness of the associated issues so as to change how and what people burn.

We are developing an evidence base to understand the specific circumstances in Wales with respect to domestic solid fuel combustion. Importantly, we need to better understand the specific position in Wales with respect to the types of appliances and fuels being used and the introduction of future product standards to inform the most effective behaviours and interventions. We are working with all relevant stakeholders

including HETAS, an organisation working for consumers to promote the safe and effective use of solid fuels, and the Stove Industry Alliance, an association of stove manufacturers and wood fuel suppliers, to underpin this work.

I believe work we are developing through the Clean Air Programme should reassure the committee a wide range of cross-Government actions are being developed to ensure sustained air quality and health improvements.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hannah Blythyn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

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