



## Improving air quality Contents

### Conclusions and recommendations

#### Health impacts

1. Air pollution is a national health emergency, resulting in tens of thousands of early deaths and costing billions of pounds in health impacts each year. It is unacceptable that successive governments have failed to protect the public from poisonous air. A step change in Government policy is now needed to address this. (Paragraph 11)
2. Air pollution has a significant impact on health, but we heard that the health community has not been sufficiently engaged in the air quality debate. *The health sector needs to play a stronger, more visible, and more vocal role in tackling air quality. This should occur at a national level, through the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England; at a local level, through local authority Directors of Public Health; and through NHS organisations.* (Paragraph 14)
3. The debate on air quality is too often cast as a war against motorists, when in fact regular car users are among the worst affected. Pollution levels are often higher inside cars than on the street, meaning a switch to active transport offers dual health benefits. *There is an urgent need for a national information campaign providing clear messages about the risks of air pollution and the actions people can take. This campaign should be run by Public Health England, and implemented no later than September 2018.* (Paragraph 18)
4. Better information about air quality is also needed at a local level. *We recommend that air pollution levels should be monitored at key spots within local communities—for example near schools, hospitals and care homes—and the results clearly communicated to local residents and service users. This will not only serve to reinforce the value of measures such as anti-idling campaigns, but will also provide the public with the information they need to press their elected representatives for further changes at a local authority level.* (Paragraph 19)

#### Clean air in law

5. Successive governments have been slow to take the necessary action on air pollution even when confronted with legal proceedings at the UK and EU level. *We therefore welcome Defra's suggestion that a new Environmental Protection Agency be established to hold Government to account after EU-exit, and recommend that provision for such an agency be written into legislation, specifying equivalent powers, standards and enforcement mechanisms as the equivalent enforcement agencies in the EU. Given the tight timescales surrounding EU-exit, we recommend that Defra publishes its consultation response on the proposed Environmental Protection Agency and the extent of its powers as soon as possible. The new watchdog must have powers equivalent to those of the European Commission to force the Government to act, otherwise action on air quality will be further weakened.* (Paragraph 26)
6. The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill does not make provision for post-Brexit institutional and governance arrangements for air quality. *The Government should establish appropriate institutions and agencies to independently enforce air quality requirements. Furthermore, the Government should establish in primary legislation a requirement that UK air pollution standards are at least as high as equivalent standards in the EU, and that the relevant enforcement agency must have equivalent powers, standards and enforcement mechanisms as the equivalent agencies in the EU.* (Paragraph 27)
7. The current legislative framework for air quality is not doing enough to protect public and environmental health. Improvements to air quality legislation should feature prominently in Defra's commitment to delivering a 'Green Brexit'. *The Government must bring forward legislative proposals on clean air that unify and update existing laws in a new Clean Air Act. The Government must set out its regulatory course, including whether to adopt World Health Organization air quality guidelines for all air pollutants, including sulphur dioxide, particulate matter and ozone, and not just nitrogen dioxide. This legislation should aim to achieve the widest possible health benefits by adopting World Health Organization targets into UK statute.* (Paragraph 34)

#### Evaluating the Government's approach to air quality

8. We do not believe the latest air quality plan will deliver improvements at a pace and scale proportionate to the size of the challenge. The High Court agrees. Significant improvements to the plan, and to the Government's wider approach to air quality, are needed to protect the public from toxic air. Defra's latest plan also focuses largely on achieving legal compliance. Whilst we appreciate the necessity of this, we believe the Government should move from this narrow focus on technical infringements towards a long-term holistic strategy which prioritises environmental and health benefits. (Paragraph 42)
9. *Defra's forthcoming Clean Air Strategy must ensure that public health and environmental protection are at the forefront of Government thinking. The strategy must ensure measures are considered and implemented as a suite of complementary packages rather than in isolation, as has previously been the case with NO2. Improving public transport and providing incentive packages that reduce the need for private vehicles must form a key part of this approach. This national action plan must also ensure air quality policies are properly aligned with public health and climate change goals.* (Paragraph 43)
10. The current approach to monitoring and modelling is not operating at its full potential and is overly focused on demonstrating compliance. The modelling process is subject to substantial (+/-29%) uncertainty. Defra has directed 23 local authorities to take action, based on a central forecast that 25 of the UK's 43 reporting zones would otherwise not comply with NO2 limits by 2021. Given the model's level of uncertainty, however, the low and high scenarios show that as few as 1 or as many as 37 reporting zones could be non-compliant in 2021 if no additional action is taken. Direct measurement of air pollution is much more accurate than estimation and modelling is likely to be. The Government should work with local government to obtain these more accurate measurements. These actions should be supported by real world vehicle emissions testing and support for local authorities to acquire and use technology to monitor live emission levels. More detailed information on the impacts of individual policy interventions is required to enable councils to tackle air quality as efficiently as possible. Improved oversight of local monitoring stations by the responsible bodies is also needed to ensure they are properly sited and functioning. (Paragraph 46)
11. *National action frameworks should take greater account of local authority data. The overall approach to air quality monitoring needs to be expanded to capture more useful local data and ensure this is used effectively to inform appropriate policy action. This will require greater investment in existing and emerging local surveillance capabilities. Defra should conduct an evidence review; investigate the steps needed to undertake such an expansion; and develop a pilot project by December 2018. Defra should provide a progress update in response to this Report.* (Paragraph 47)

#### Improving delivery of the 2017 plan

12. The Government is failing to provide clear messaging and national leadership on the issue of charging Clean Air Zones (CAZ). Defra's technical report found that charging zones offer the fastest and most effective route to air quality improvements, yet the 2017 plan requires councils to demonstrate that all other measures will fail to achieve the necessary results before introducing a charging zone. This lack of clarity is causing confusion and hampering councils' ability to tackle air pollution as quickly as possible. (Paragraph 56)
13. *Defra's modelling already shows that, in many cases, non-charging options will not be as swift or effective as charging Clean Air Zones. If local authorities are regularly exceeding NO2 concentration limits and identify a charging Clean Air Zone as being the most effective mitigation strategy, they should be able to receive Government support for implementing a CAZ without having to go to onerous lengths to demonstrate the inefficacy of other options. If this approach fails to deliver the required improvements as quickly as possible, the Government should consider mandating charging zones in hotspot areas.* (Paragraph 57)
14. *There is a risk that, if not supported with additional measures, Clean Air Zone charges will disproportionately affect low-income drivers. We recommend that all Clean Air Zone proposals are accompanied by mitigating measures to reduce the effect on low-income motorists.* (Paragraph 58)
15. Reducing the need for private vehicle use within our metropolitan cities should be a key aim of air quality policy. There is not enough urgency in the Government's current strategy to achieve this. *Defra and the Department for Transport must work closely with local authorities to ensure that councils introducing Clean Air Zones receive the support they need to implement complementary measures which encourage car drivers to switch to public transport, active travel or electric vehicles. This may involve granting local authorities greater powers, for example over lane rental schemes and new development. Defra and the DfT should also urgently evaluate whether there are sufficient resources to ensure enough clean buses can be introduced in air quality hotspots to reduce NO2 concentration levels as fast as possible. The Departments should inform us of the outcome of this assessment in response to this Report.* (Paragraph 64)
16. *Defra and the Department for Transport must clarify in response to this Report how they will ensure that Clean Air Zones will not simply displace polluting vehicles to areas where monitoring is more limited, and what systems will be implemented to verify this accurately.* (Paragraph 67)
17. *Defra and the Department for Transport must ensure Clean Air Zone plans include robust economic impact assessments, and work with local authorities to ensure affected communities and businesses are made aware of the support measures accompanying clean air plans. To ensure small businesses are not disproportionately affected by the new measures, Defra and the DfT should also investigate the feasibility of providing small businesses with more time or resources to upgrade their vehicles.* (Paragraph 71)

#### Funding clean air and supporting local authorities

18. Local authorities face significant financial restrictions and this is directly affecting their ability to meet air pollution targets. The narrow scope of the 2017 plan restricts councils struggling with air quality from accessing the support and guidance they need to reduce pollution levels as quickly as possible. The funding committed does not reflect the externalised health costs of air pollution or the savings that improvements to air quality would bring. *The 2017 NO2 air quality plan should be widened to offer direction, financial resources, and technical support to the 45 local authority areas which breach NO2 limit levels but are not included under the current action framework. This should be accompanied with commensurate financial increases in the Implementation Fund and Clean Air Fund.* (Paragraph 77)
19. *Defra should examine additional ways of raising funds for air quality improvements. This should first involve establishing a fund for clean air initiatives partially financed by the private sector. This should be organised by December 2018. The Government should provide us with a progress update in response to this Report. Defra should further examine the expected financial returns from charging zones and the feasibility of allowing local authorities to use this money to fund local air quality schemes. Defra should inform us of the outcome of these assessments in response to this Report.* (Paragraph 80)
20. We recognise the need for councils to take ownership of delivering local solutions to local problems. However, we do not believe significant, sustainable reductions in air pollution across the country will be achieved on the scale needed without additional support. Existing mechanisms do not appear to be delivering the necessary results. *The Joint Air Quality Unit should develop a centralised support programme available to all local authorities to address current and prevent future air pollution problems. Plans for the support programme should be developed with the aim of making a service available nationally by January 2019. We would be grateful for written confirmation of the establishment of this service.* (Paragraph 85)
21. *We welcome the proposal to introduce air quality emissions information in vehicle labelling, and urge the Government to provide clear guidance on how this will be extended to the second-hand market as quickly and effectively as possible. The Government should also consider aligning this labelling system with an easily accessible online register of real-world emissions to help consumers make informed choices. We recommend the Government re-examines its anti-idling policy guidance to assess whether higher fines and stricter enforcement mechanisms should be used to discourage motorists from idling.* (Paragraph 89)

## Joined up action

22. Improvements to air quality can only be sustained by co-ordinated cross-departmental action on policy development, legislation, taxation and spending. Defra and the Treasury are not demonstrating the firm leadership needed to achieve this, and it is unclear that the Inter-Ministerial Group on clean growth has demonstrated sufficient progress either. *The remit of the Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU) should therefore be expanded to meet this need. JAQU should work with the Cabinet Office to ensure all Departments are clear about their duty to consider air quality in policy development. JAQU should further scrutinise policies relating to air quality across all Departments to ensure these form a coherent set of complementary actions. Public health officials should play a key role in JAQU's scrutiny work to ensure health considerations are properly taken into account. Defra and the DfT should outline a delivery framework in response to this Report and provide us with regular subsequent progress updates.* (Paragraph 94)

23. Greater inter-disciplinary involvement in urban planning and collaboration across local authorities is needed to ensure that air pollution, congestion, obesity and a range of public health issues are tackled through joined-up initiatives. *Government should give additional priority to the funding of infrastructure projects which will help to meet air quality objectives. We welcome efforts from local authorities to work collaboratively to address air pollution, and recommend the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) plays a more active role in supporting greater co-ordination.* (Paragraph 95)

24. *More robust air quality policies should also be included in all Local Plans. MHCLG should audit Local Plans for authorities with NO<sub>2</sub> exceedances to assess whether the National Planning Policy Framework guidance is doing enough to encourage effective action on air quality. MHCLG should inform us of its findings in response to this Report.* (Paragraph 96)

25. The health impacts of poor air quality cost the UK an estimated £20 billion per year. We are not convinced that HM Treasury is taking sufficient account of this when establishing taxation and spending policy. We are also concerned that current fiscal incentives for CO<sub>2</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub> reduction are disjointed. *The Treasury must take greater account of the costs of air pollution when establishing taxation and spending policy. It must explore how existing policies to achieve CO<sub>2</sub> reductions can be combined with air quality targets—particularly NO<sub>2</sub> and particulate matter—to produce a single instrument that delivers on both. The Treasury could begin by examining the feasibility of incorporating harmful pollutant emissions into vehicle taxation. The Treasury should update us on progress in the Government's response to this Report.* (Paragraph 100)

26. *We recommend the Treasury introduces more ambitious measures to encourage the take-up of low emission vehicles. This should include a revision of Vehicle Excise Duty rates to better incentivise both new purchases and support the second-hand market.* (Paragraph 101)

27. There is no single effective system for tracking the funding commitments across Government which aim to deliver air quality benefits. We are also not convinced there is a unified system for evaluating and comparing the outcomes of particular air quality schemes. This lack of joined-up working and fragmented oversight means there is no way of knowing whether existing policies are delivering a coherent set of measures that represent good value for money. (Paragraph 106)

28. *The remit of JAQU should be expanded to track spending on measures intended to improve air quality across all Departments. JAQU should also develop a system to help better quantify what effect new policies will have on air quality, and measure their actual impact after implementation. This information should be collated into a single resource to provide a robust, easily accessible evidence base for future decision-making.* (Paragraph 107)

## Cleaner vehicles on our roads

29. There is insufficient urgency in current policies to accelerate vehicle fleet renewal. Whilst we welcome the Government's commitment to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2040, this target lacks sufficient ambition. It is too distant to produce a step-change in industry and local government planning, and falls far behind similar commitments from other countries. The Minister believed the UK could phase out conventional cars before 2040, and this ambition should be reflected in the Government's policy targets. (Paragraph 113)

30. *The Government should bring forward the date by which the sale of conventional petrol and diesel vehicles will be ended. The Government should conduct a feasibility assessment to determine the earliest date by which this could be achieved, balancing the health impacts of air pollution with economic and practical considerations. We expect the Government to then require manufacturers to end the sale of conventional petrol and diesel vehicles by this earlier date. The Government should inform us of the outcome of its assessments in response to this Report.* (Paragraph 114)

31. *The Government should set out a procurement route map to show how it will achieve this target in the Budget, and extend this commitment to cover the fleets of all departments, agencies and public bodies.* (Paragraph 117)

32. We welcome the Government's optimism that ULEV targets will be met. This now needs to be translated into concrete action. The current pace of change is far too slow and we have no confidence that there will be adequate infrastructure to support the UK's rapid transition away from polluting vehicles without substantial efforts from both central Government and local authorities. *The Government should work with National Grid and local authorities to identify the key practical barriers preventing a more rapid roll-out of charging infrastructure, and provide details and timescales of how these will be overcome in response to this Report. Local authorities also need to be clear that they should be facilitating the switch to ULEVs as far as possible. This should be clearly communicated to residents and planning committees.* (Paragraph 120)

33. We are not convinced that the existing framework for delivering charging infrastructure adequately addresses strategic priorities. *The DfT should work with Defra and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that charging infrastructure addresses strategic needs and prioritises air quality hotspots. A technology-neutral approach must be maintained whilst ensuring these systems are future-proofed and capable of handling increases in usage and larger battery sizes.* (Paragraph 121)

34. It is important that the switch to electric vehicles does not simply move emissions from the tailpipe to power plants. *The Government should produce a detailed roadmap outlining how the predicted increase in energy consumption arising from greater ULEV uptake will be produced using clean sources, and the concrete steps needed to ensure these goals are met.* (Paragraph 122)

35. The current rate of renewal of the UK fleet means it will be many years before ultra-low emission vehicles replace all of the most polluting vehicle types. A national scrappage scheme could speed up this process considerably. Any scrappage scheme must include provisions to support low-income drivers and small businesses. The Government should focus on reducing vehicle use and encouraging public transport use where practical, rather than simply switching to alternative vehicle types. Therefore any scrappage scheme must be accompanied by a suite of additional measures and not implemented in isolation. (Paragraph 127)

36. *Defra must publish its analysis of the scrappage consultation responses as soon as possible. It should provide details of the fiscal measures it would take to fund any scrappage proposals and the value for money this represents. The Government should also work closely with private scrappage providers to ensure that existing schemes do more to target support at low-income households and small businesses.* (Paragraph 128)

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[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

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