

# Protecting children from harmful vehicle emissions

House of Lords

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## Key Messages

- Air pollution is a public health emergency and councils are determined to reduce the impact of harmful emissions on our communities in all its forms.
- An estimated 4.2 million premature deaths globally are linked to ambient air pollution, mainly from heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, and acute respiratory infections in children<sup>1</sup>. Air pollution is the biggest environmental threat to health in the UK, with between 28,000 and 36,000 deaths a year attributed to long-term exposure.
- Good air quality is vital for our health and quality of life, particularly for children. We need to be able to live in safe communities, and making sure the air we breathe is as free from pollution as possible is vital.
- The Government's clean air strategy is a welcome development and contains many actions that the LGA supports. However environmental protection work needs to be resourced and with councils facing a funding gap of £8 billion by 2025 any strategy that asks councils to do more will need resources attached to it.
- If the Government's air quality plans and any new local powers are to be successful, they need to be underpinned by local flexibility and sufficient funding which needs to be addressed in the Spending Review.
- A holistic approach is needed across local, regional and national levels in order to reduce harmful emissions. Councils need local powers to tackle air pollution, particularly with regard to moving traffic offences. Government must also support councils on planning and transport matters, and introduce a robust national action to help the country transition to low-emission vehicles and power generation.

# Briefing

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## Background information

### Public Health

- A whole system approach

Air pollution does not adhere to local authority boundaries. The health effects of air pollution are distributed unequally across the population, with the heaviest burden borne by those with greatest vulnerability and/or exposure to it. The elderly, children and those with cardiovascular and/or respiratory disease are at greater risk from the health effects of air pollution<sup>2</sup>. There are between 28,000 and 36,000 deaths a year attributed to long-term exposure to poor air<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore we must develop a whole system approach across local, regional and national levels in improving outdoor air quality. This must be developed and implemented by key partners across transport, planning, health and education. Effective partnership working is vital for bringing down mortality associated with air pollution.

- Public health funding

Councils' have seized new opportunities to make health everybody's business since taking on responsibilities for public health in 2013. However, public health funding in England will be cut by £700 million in real terms by the end 2020. Although councils have been acting to manage these cuts without detriment to outcomes they have reached the limit of available efficiencies. Cuts to public health funding may result in cuts to interventions which reduce harm caused by air pollution.

- Co-benefits to health

Prioritising initiatives that maximise the benefits to both population health and the environment represents the best value for money for local authorities, as well as having a greater positive impact overall. These 'co-benefits' to health could include increasing physical activity and reducing air pollution caused by vehicles. Improvements to air quality can be achieved through making walking, cycling and use of public transport the preferred and accessible form of mobility.

- Research and evidence

More evidence is needed to identify high impact interventions that are likely to have the greatest co-benefits for both air quality and health. The research agenda needs to focus on how changes to the built environment can support uptake of active travel and public transport and the policies needed to achieve this. It should also be noted that communicating the impacts of air pollution to the population and alerting those considered more vulnerable of poor air quality days is extremely important and more innovative approaches are needed to make this messaging effective and useful.

Local authorities have a major role to play and since the transfer of public health to local authorities in 2013, Directors of Public Health and Councillors have taken action leadership on air quality. In 2017, along with the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH), we worked collaboratively with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Public Health (PHE) to generate a suite of tools<sup>4</sup> to assist local authorities to take action to improve air quality. Local authorities are already well positioned to improve air quality but their role and ability needs to be strengthened.

Councils are playing a pivotal role in tackling air pollution and reducing emissions from vehicles to improve people's health and quality of life, including encouraging the use of

electric vehicles with recharging points, promoting cycling, managing air pollution monitoring networks and introducing low-emission zones.

- Transport and impact on poor health

There are no safe levels of exposure to vehicle emissions including particulate matters (PM). There is emerging evidence to suggest that it is more dangerous than previously believed. Government policy should be geared towards continually reducing levels rather than adherence to limit values.

There is a growing consensus of the danger to health that is posed by PM. Much of this particulate comes from brake and tyre wear as well as deterioration of the road surface<sup>5</sup>. None of these sources will be tackled by plans to invest in a transition of engine technology. The Government should invest in encouraging policies that result in modal shift i.e. to public transport, cycling and walking, with all the added benefits that brings to reduced congestion and improved public health. The Government should not be prioritising expensive technical solutions when behavioural change could achieve the same goals.

The Government's clean air strategy is a welcome development and contains many actions that the LGA supports. However environmental protection work needs to be resourced and with councils facing a funding gap of £8 billion by 2025 any strategy that asks councils to do more will need resources attached to it.

#### Councils' impact in reducing air pollution

Councils are taking the lead in delivering reductions in Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) through clean air plans. London has already implemented a chargeable low emission zone and a number of other zones are likely to follow. Local authorities are developing plans to bring the UK into compliance with obligations under EU law.

Councils have powers to enforce idling restrictions and to issue fines to motorists. Although fines to drivers who leave their engines idling are issued as a last resort, the legislation to enable this is hard to enforce in practice. Councils have prioritised changing behaviour by educating motorists, which is often more effective than issuing fines. As part of their review of air quality legislation, the Government should look again at whether these powers are working how they intended and whether they could be made simpler to use while still being fair to the motorist. Currently a fine can only be issued after a motorist has already been warned by a civil enforcement officer.

Local authorities have a responsibility for designating local air quality management areas in order to bring down emissions in places where it exceeds legal limits. The Government is currently reviewing the legislation that sits behind these powers and has promised to bring forward new legislation as part of the proposed Environment Bill. The LGA supports the broad principle of simplifying and updating the statutory framework for clean air. Some of the powers are decades old and do not fully account for modern patterns of pollution. Clarity is needed on whether responsibilities are to be moved from the tier they sit with and whether new burdens will be imposed upon authorities. It is however worth re-iterating that strengthened powers will need enforcement which will require resourcing.

The LGA would welcome further measures to tackle congestion as stop-start traffic can increase harmful emissions by four times<sup>6</sup>. The LGA has called for the full implementation of Part 6 of the 2004 Traffic Management Act for areas outside London, which would enable councils to enforce against moving traffic offences as is currently possible only in London. We would also like the Government to actively support authorities that wish to introduce a workplace parking levy, examples from the introduction in Nottingham demonstrate that it has reduced early morning peak traffic levels. Both these powers would be self-funding. Working to reduce congestion and smooth traffic flows should form a key part of the clean air strategy and these powers would be simple for the Government to introduce.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, Ambient air pollution: Health impacts,  
<https://www.who.int/airpollution/ambient/health-impacts/en/>

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organisation, Ambient air pollution: Health impacts,  
<https://www.who.int/airpollution/ambient/health-impacts/en/>

<sup>3</sup> Public Health England, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/public-health-england-publishes-air-pollution-evidence-review>

<sup>4</sup> LGA, Air Quality A Briefing for Directors of Public Health,  
[https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/6.3091\\_DEFRA\\_AirQualityGuide\\_9web\\_0.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/6.3091_DEFRA_AirQualityGuide_9web_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> DEFRA, Clean Air Strategy 2019,  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/770715/clean-air-strategy-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/770715/clean-air-strategy-2019.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> On-road emission factors, <https://www.inderscienceonline.com/doi/abs/10.1504/IJVD.1998.001842>