

Hannah Blythyn AC/AM
Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd
Minister for Environment



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref HB/01054/18

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Thank you for your letter of 2 November regarding Petition P-05-825, which concerns the protection of children's lungs from harmful pollution whilst at school.

Improving air quality to support healthier communities and better environments is a priority for the Welsh Government and this is reflected in our National Strategy: Prosperity for All. Likewise, this is 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. Specifically, particulate matter pollution is generated from a number of sources including transport, industry, domestic solid fuel burning and sources in other European countries. Clean air is important for us all, but particularly for those who are most sensitive, including the very young, elderly people and those with certain health conditions.

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.

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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.

As I set out in my response to you of 18 July, 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 specific regard to air quality monitoring, local authorities are required to take a risk-based approach to the assessment and monitoring of local air quality. Local authorities focus on locations where members of the public are likely to be exposed to high levels of air pollution. This should be informed by where the evidence, including evidence drawn to their attention by local communities, indicates people are likely to be exposed to the highest 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 existing LAQM guidance for local authorities recognises schools, 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 Clean Air Plan, we will be reviewing the current LAQM regime to determine whether it can be improved.

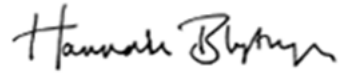
As part of the work required to underpin the Clean Air Programme and future Government policy, we are working with partners, including the British Lung Foundation Cymru, to provide the right evidence bases in Wales. To take this work forward, the Welsh Government has developed a project to complement existing evidence on airborne pollution with timely and more local evidence where it is needed, to enable better targeted actions and policies in Wales. Project activities will include the assessment of priority areas for action on air poor air quality across Wales, including at sensitive receptor locations such as schools and hospitals, collecting new evidence where it is necessary. This may be supported by the deployment of mobile monitors and modelling, if it is appropriate. 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.

Resources aimed at tackling poor air quality need to be targeted effectively and the type and level of assessment, including the number and location of monitoring stations, needs to be proportionate to the likely risk. Individuals don't tend to walk around urban environments constantly, including school grounds. However, people tend to spend time travelling or they are indoors. This can include their home, school or work, where they will be exposed to other sources of pollution. Individual exposure assessment is a developing field, being driven by the development of personal monitors and sensors which can support the collection of information on the individual's daily activity patterns. The Air Quality Expert Group has provided independent scientific advice to the Welsh Government on the application of air pollution sensors, their uncertainties and recommendations and where they may, or may not, be appropriate to use¹. I welcome innovative solutions to improve the assessment of air quality across Wales and as technologies evolve applications will arise which bring new insight to air pollution issues. We will keep such developments under review and welcome the active involvement of stakeholders to capitalise on potential development opportunities.

¹ <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/library/aqeg/pollution-sensors.php>

I welcome your ongoing interest in actions to improve air quality in Wales. I can assure you we will take account of all of the information and proposals provided by the British Lung Foundation Cymru as we develop our Clean Air Plan for Wales.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hannah Blythyn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial 'H'.

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