

Chapter two: World leading governance for clean air



Priority actions for the UK Government: Clean air



1 Raise ambition...

Secure a world-leading governance framework for air quality, raising the ambition of existing strategies and targets, and addressing governance gaps.



2 deliver locally...

Back local authorities to deliver on clean air, through increased powers, funding and clear guidance.



3 address indoor air...

Raise the profile of indoor air quality in the UK's approach to public health and take immediate action to tackle the sources of poor indoor air quality.



4 take a strategic approach...

Produce ambitious strategies for highly polluting industries and novel contaminants.



5 ...and monitor to ensure success.

Expand air quality monitoring and alert networks, facilitating the use of high-quality equipment and best practice to provide robust data that informs decision making.

“Healthy air should be a core public health aspiration of the next five years.”

Air pollution is the single largest environmental threat to public health. It is estimated to cause at least **29,000 deaths each year** in the UK.

Breathing poor quality air increases the risk of developing conditions such as cancer, heart disease, dementia, and chronic respiratory conditions. Air pollution also damages and degrades the natural environment.

Trends in outdoor air quality are generally improving, but recent progress has been slow, and the UK is not on track to meet the majority of its emissions reduction targets.

Some emission sources are also lagging significantly behind and require urgent action. Emissions from agriculture and domestic burning have seen a significant increase over the last decade.

Indoor air quality has been historically neglected, despite many of us spending around **90% of our time indoors**. The IAQM has been working to raise the profile of indoor air quality and produced **leading guidance** for air quality, construction and planning professionals in 2021.

Healthy air should be a core public health aspiration of the next five years. Improving air quality will have particular benefits for

deprived communities, who are more likely to live close to pollution sources and often have existing health vulnerabilities.

Government must work with local authorities and local communities, as well as the environmental science and air quality professions, to deliver an evidence-informed, just transition towards healthy air.

This will have wider benefits: many actions taken to improve air quality can also tackle climate emissions, improve biodiversity, and reduce noise pollution.

Box 1. About the IAQM

The **Institute of Air Quality Management** (IAQM) is the professional body for air quality professionals in the UK, acting as the voice for air quality by producing useful and timely guidance on matters affecting air quality professionals and by responding to Government consultations.

The IAQM is committed to maintaining, enhancing and promoting the highest standards of working practices in the field and supports the development of professionals working in the sector.

1. **Secure a world-leading governance framework for air quality, raising the ambition of existing strategies and targets, and addressing governance gaps.**

- i. Raise the ambition of the UK's air quality targets, setting out a credible plan for achieving **World Health Organization (WHO) 2021 Air Quality Guidelines** as soon as possible, including meeting an interim 2030 target of an annual mean concentration of 10 micrograms per cubic metre for PM2.5.
- ii. Introduce a right to clean air into UK law.
- iii. Commit to a regular review of the **Air Quality Strategy**, to take place at least every three years with a consultation period of at least two months.
- iv. Introduce a statutory requirement for local authorities to produce local air quality strategies for all **key pollutants**, and to consider PM2.5 in annual status reports.
- v. Put in place oversight mechanisms to ensure air quality delivery plans are reviewed and consulted upon when national limits are exceeded, as **called for by the OEP**.

This will support the Government's "**bold new ambition to raise the healthiest generation of children**", addressing one the largest threats to public health in the UK.

This requirement will allow the Government to deliver its **manifesto commitment** to "**tackle the social determinants of health, halving the gap in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest regions.**"

2. Back local authorities to deliver on clean air, through increased powers, funding and clear guidance.

- i. Clarify and strengthen the powers and enforcement abilities of all types of local authorities to tackle air pollution, including from vehicle idling and wood burning, and by enabling public transport and active travel.
- ii. Prioritise clear guidance and unambiguous political support for an evidence-informed community-led dialogue on air quality interventions, such as clean air zones and low traffic neighbourhoods.
- iii. Deliver long-term non-competitive funding to local authorities for air quality management, including and going beyond filling the gap left by the scrapping of the **air quality grant scheme**.

In the context of air quality, this realises the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **"widen devolution to more areas, encouraging local authorities to come together and take on new powers... ensure those places have the strong governance arrangements, capacity, and capability to deliver."**

3. Raise the profile of indoor air quality in the UK's approach to public health and take immediate action to tackle the sources of poor indoor air quality.

- i. Close the gaps for evidence and monitoring identified by the Air Quality Expert Group's 2022 **Indoor Air Quality report**.
- ii. Set out a road map for tackling indoor air quality, including an action plan for phasing out non-essential solid fuel burning in homes.
- iii. Deliver a clear and unified national public health campaign to raise awareness of the health impacts of solid fuel burning in the home, building on the work of the **London Wood Burning Project**.

This aligns with the Government's **manifesto commitment** that **"to provide greater stability, a Labour government will give councils multi-year funding settlements and end wasteful competitive bidding."**

This supports the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **"take preventative public health measures to tackle the biggest killers and support people to live longer, healthier lives."** The World Health Organization describes air pollution as "the largest environmental threat to human health worldwide."

4. Produce ambitious strategies for highly polluting industries and novel contaminants.

- i. Tackle agricultural emissions by publishing a strategy to reduce ammonia, identifying the organisations responsible for delivering improvements, and setting strict targets for 2030, 2040 and 2050.
- ii. Publish the updated **Clean Maritime Plan**, which was due to be published in 2022, with explicit policies to tackle air pollution in ports, as set out by **Transport & Environment's 2024 report**.
- iii. Publish the long-awaited Chemicals Strategy, explicitly including plans to regulate on indoor chemical products, novel contaminants, and 'forever chemicals' such as PFAS.

This will be crucial to meeting the UK's climate and air quality targets while supporting the delivery of the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **"a serious industrial strategy and a genuine partnership between the public and private sectors ... we can make Britain a clean energy superpower."**

This would be a key step towards meeting the Government's **goal in its manifesto** to **"tackle the ... nature emergency, including the unforgivable pollution of our rivers and seas."**

5. Expand air quality monitoring and alert networks, facilitating the use of high-quality equipment and best practice to provide robust data that informs decision making.

- i. Expand and join up the air quality monitoring and alerts network, including increased monitoring of black carbon and ultra fine particulate matter.
- ii. Work with the scientific community to set standards, ensuring that monitoring equipment, especially new low-cost sensors, are robust and appropriately used, including by citizen scientists.

This would bring clean air in line with the Government's proposed **approach to water** in its manifesto, which includes the **role of independent monitoring**.