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Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts
House of Commons London
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28 February 2023

From Tamara Finkelstein CB and Dame Bernadette
Permanent Secretary

**Twenty-Second Report: Tackling Local Air Quality Breaches - Follow up
response**

Dear Chair,

We committed to write to the Committee by the end of February 2023 with a further update on how Government is engaging with local authorities in relation to the NO₂ programme.

Tackling high pollution levels is a serious challenge for communities across the UK which is why the Government has put in place a plan to improve air quality and reduce harmful emissions. Under the 2017 UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) Concentrations, which reflects our obligations under the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2010, local authorities are legally bound to take urgent action to address NO₂ exceedances in their area. A full list of NO₂ programme local authorities is at Annex B.

The Defra/DfT Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU) works in close collaboration with local authorities, whilst holding them to account for the legal obligation of delivering compliance with NO₂ targets in the shortest possible time. Each local authority in the NO₂ Programme has a dedicated account manager and specialist support from

science leads, economist leads and transport modellers where needed. Please see the annex for case studies of the ways in which we have worked with local authorities.

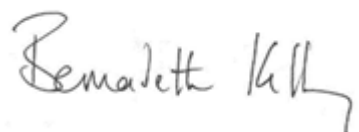
Local authorities with high levels of exceedances are expected to model a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) as a benchmark option to measure the impact of less stringent measures. When local authorities submit plans, the Government assesses them to ensure they are effective, fair, good value and will deliver improvements to air quality in the shortest time possible.

This is a complex government major programme, involving multiple delivery partners and working closely with local authorities. We have made significant progress in tackling NO₂ pollution against a challenging backdrop, including the pandemic. Since we were before you in the summer, we have supported local authorities to deliver CAZs in Bristol, Tyneside (Newcastle and Gateshead), and Sheffield (launching 27 February 2023).

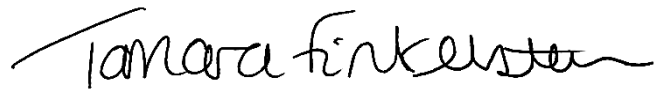
The NO₂ Programme has now largely moved into a delivery and evaluation phase as the majority of plans have now been approved and many are now fully delivered. We therefore have focused on supporting local authorities with the implementation of their schemes. Government plays a particular role in the delivery of CAZs as the digital infrastructure is centrally managed by JAQU and DVLA.

We hope this is helpful.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bernadette Kelly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dame Bernadette Kelly DCB
Permanent Secretary,
Department for Transport

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tamara Finkelstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

TAMARA FINKELSTEIN

Permanent Secretary

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Annex A: case studies of working with local authorities

Working with Coventry City Council to assess whether a CAZ was needed

The UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) Concentrations provides that, when presented with two options that are likely to deliver compliance at the same time, the non-charging option should be preferred. An example of how this approach works in practice can be seen in relation to Coventry City Council's plan. At Outline Business Case (OBC) stage Coventry City Council were directed to move toward implementation of a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) as, based on the evidence provided with their OBC at that time, the benchmark CAZ option was more likely than their preferred option to deliver compliance in the shortest possible time. Coventry City Council subsequently revised their plan and provided updated evidence setting out how their revised preferred option, a package of non-charging measures, and the benchmark CAZ option, could deliver compliance in the same timeframe. Bearing in mind the overarching principles set out in the national plan, and after careful consideration of the evidence presented, Ministers agreed to Coventry City Council's revised plan and ultimately issued a new direction requiring Coventry to implement their revised plan for a package of non-charging measures instead of a Clean Air Zone

Working with Bristol City Council on the impacts of Covid-19

When the impacts of the Covid-19 were still being understood, we proactively engaged with local authorities to give them time to consider the impact on their areas. Prior to the pandemic, the measures that needed to be implemented by Bristol City Council were a medium Clean Air Zone Class C with a small Clean Air Zone Class D and additional measures. As a result of the measures that they introduced through the green recovery powers, there was a case for bringing in a less stringent CAZ. We worked with the LA and assessed the case before agreeing that they could instead implement a small Class D Clean Air Zone with the closure of Cumberland Road inbound to general traffic and and traffic signals are optimised to control the volume of traffic entering congested areas with poor air quality.

Working with Portsmouth City Council on delivery

Portsmouth City Council worked with JAQU, DVLA and our suppliers to deliver a Clean Air Zone in November 2021. The Council was supported from the development of their Local NO2 Plan to the ultimate delivery of their Clean Air Zone by JAQU. The Council was highly collaborative with JAQU establishing a 'one-team' working culture which helped to solve issues before they arose. JAQU provided a dedicated account manager, implementation manager, science and evaluation lead and economist to support the LA. The implementation lead oversaw the joint plan from end-to-end and supported Portsmouth City Council officials and their contractors throughout the delivery process for setting up a Clean Air Zone, sharing their experience and lessons learned from supporting other local authority Zone launches.

Annex B: List of NO2 Programme Local Authorities

Ashfield
Basildon & Essex
Basingstoke & Deane
Bath and NE Somerset (BaNES)
Birmingham
Blaby
Blackwater Valley (Rushmore, Surrey Heath, Guildford)
Bolsover
Bournemouth
Bradford
Bristol
Broxbourne
Burnley
Calderdale
Cheltenham
Coventry
Derby
Dudley
Fareham
Gateshead
Greater Manchester (Bury, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Salford, Rochdale, Wigan, Bolton, Manchester City, Oldham)
Kirklees
Leeds
Leicester
Liverpool
Middlesbrough
New Forest
Newcastle
Newcastle under Lyme
North Tyneside
Nottingham
Oxford

Peterborough
Plymouth
Poole
Portsmouth
Reading
Rochdale
Rochford
Rotherham
Sandwell
Sefton
Sheffield
Solihull
South Gloucestershire
South Tyneside
Southampton
Southend on Sea
Stoke on Trent
Sunderland
Wakefield
Walsall
Wigan
Wolverhampton