

To: leaders of all political parties, parliamentarians, and manifesto writers,

We, the undersigned, urge all political parties to prioritise policies which improve air quality within their manifesto commitments.

Cleaning up the air has the potential to drastically improve public health and reduce health inequalities. Cleaner air could prevent up to 43,000 avoidable deaths in the UK each year (1) and reduce harm from long-term chronic conditions such as asthma (2), cardiovascular disease (3), and low birth weight (4) in babies.

Air pollution also impacts mental health, and has been associated with decline in cognitive function, dementia, increased risk of developing schizophrenia (5), depression (6), anxiety (7), mood disorders (8); and increased risk of stroke (9). Air pollution is a major driver of health inequalities, with the most deprived UK communities and those from black or ethnic minority backgrounds more likely to live in polluted areas (10, 11).

Cleaner air would support better educational development in children (12), and avoid three million lost workdays (13), thus benefiting society, business, and the economy. Improvements in air quality can bring community benefits such as reduced rates of crime (14), safer streets with fewer vehicles, better public transport, and more accessible active travel options; thereby stimulating local economies and building social cohesion.

If the government do not act on air quality, the UK will continue to have one of the highest rates of asthmatic children in Europe (15), preventable health conditions will continue to put pressure on the NHS, and the most vulnerable in society will continue to endure suffering from air pollution that they are least likely to contribute to. Inaction will entrench inequality and ensure a continued economic drain that will be more likely to widen than narrow as each year passes.

Improving air quality can generate economic benefits for the public purse. Estimates of the public cost of air pollution range from 1.6 billion to 20 billion each year (16); including missed work hours, costs to social care and the NHS, avoidable deaths, and lost opportunities for economic gains. Embracing a clean energy revolution can generate thousands of jobs for UK workers and secure the UK as a world leader in clean energy production and innovation. The solutions for clean air align with net zero goals and deliver co-benefits for the natural environment, human health, individual and community wellbeing, economic stability, and British business.

The case for clean air is clear – and action must not be delayed. As a minimum, we believe that the following four policies would make a significant contribution to improving air quality in the UK, and should be included within political manifestoes:

1. All parties should commit to bring in a Clean Air Act within the first 100 days of government, which establishes a cross-government approach to addressing the challenge of cleaning up the air, mandates meaningful interaction with devolved parliaments and local authorities, and creates a legal right to clean air. The Act should commit to meet the 2005

WHO limits for particulate matter (PM2.5) of 10 micrograms per cubic metre by 2030, 10 years earlier than the current UK Government's proposal of 2040. Once 2030 or 10 micrograms has been reached, the limit should be reduced to 5 micrograms (the current WHO limit) to be achieved as soon as possible.

2. To increase public understanding and support for the improved PM2.5 air quality target and the new Clean Air Act, the Department of Health and Social Care should lead a public engagement campaign on air quality. The campaign should highlight the impact of air pollution on health and provide guidance. This will build public understanding of the risks posed by air pollution and promote positive public attitudes towards the solutions needed to improve air quality.
3. Adopt the current government's target that half of journeys in towns and cities in England should be walked or cycled by 2030 and provide adequate and fair funding for the changes needed to deliver this goal. Consideration should be given to existing infrastructure and the needs of the community at a local level.
4. The Treasury should provide funding for the Department of Health and Social Care to lead the implementation of Clean Air Frameworks in England's 42 Integrated Care Systems, working in partnership with local authorities. The framework should be guided by UKHSA and NHS England, to include core modules covering: digitalisation, engaging patients through educating staff, infrastructure, local authority collaboration, strategic decision making, supply chain considerations, transport, and encompass a whole health care approach.

In addition, we strongly encourage the devolved nations to consider whether a replication of this approach with relevant counterpart organisations would be beneficial to the air quality and public health outcomes across the UK.

Signed by:

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