ADPH London and LEDNet joint position statement: cleaning up London's air

September 2019

Executive Summary

Air pollution in London is a major public health issue. Each year nearly 10,000 premature deaths are in part attributable to poor air quality, which widens inequalities by reducing the length and quality of life in most vulnerable residents, including children, and costs the NHS up to £3.7 billion each year. We also know that air pollution affects cognitive ability (PHE, 2018).

The London Environment Directors' Network (LEDNet) and the Association of Directors of Public Health London (ADPH London) have prepared this joint position statement to set out how we believe we should be responding to this challenge, based on our expertise and the available evidence. We support effective solutions that take a whole system approach in tackling poor air quality; this includes considering it within a wider climate change framework.

Recommendations

1.	Advocating for at least **2.5% of UK annual GDP** to be spent on tackling air quality and climate change in the UK, based on the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
2.	**Protecting children** from exposure to poor air quality by: • Implementing the Healthy Streets Approach to facilitate walking, cycling and public transport use and to discourage car use; • Taking action to mitigate pollution hotspots, particularly those around schools, including taking air quality into account when designed and refurbishing schools and providing green infrastructure barriers where appropriate; and • Protecting vulnerable populations, including children, older people and those with heart and lung disease, by providing information about less polluted routes and alerts and advice on what to do on high pollution days.
3.	Supporting a **shared narrative and campaign** on air quality and public health impacts across London that will change the public's perception around their own contribution to cleaning our air – including the overall benefits of physical activity to most people;
4.	**Restricting driving across the city**, introducing support schemes such as the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) and scrappage schemes and local schemes such as restricted and emissions-based parking, low emissions zones and building better walking and cycling infrastructure;
5.	Using **public sector procurement** and social value action to reduce our own contribution to air pollution, in particular by moving faster towards ultra-low and zero emissions vehicle fleets; and
6.	**Speaking with one voice** as boroughs to secure the resources and powers needed to reduce air pollution and protect the health of our resident

What is the problem?

Health inequalities associated with outdoor air pollution are striking. Research has found that in England and Wales young children and adults, and households in poverty are more likely to suffer from the effects of traffic than older people and more affluent households. Twenty per cent of London's primary schools are in areas that breach the legal limit for NO_2.

20%
PRIMARY SCHOOLS
are in areas that breach the legal limit for NO_2 (air pollution)

Clean air is joint responsibility of government, the private sector and individuals, and we must take a partnership approach to identifying priorities and funding action to deliver on them. Within London local government, political leaders across London are making air quality a unifying priority. When boroughs' political and officer leads for environment met in February 2019, they recognised clean air as one of their two most pressing concerns, and since then more than 20 London boroughs have declared climate emergencies. The Mayor of London has made cleaning up London's air a key priority for his administration.

What are the causes?

Road transport is currently the most significant source of emissions in London, and a key priority for the city. The evidence shows that restricting emission of pollutants at source is the most effective means of improving air quality. We therefore support policies and programmes that can do this; where we can encourage residents to embrace active travel by walking, cycling and use of public transport instead of driving this will also bring the added benefit of increased physical activity to overall health and wellbeing. Public transport will of course remain a key means of getting around, which is why subsidies and investment in public transport are also an effective means of tackling air pollution.

There are also considerable static sources of air pollution in London, mainly arising from gas boilers, machinery and construction, and industry. Other sources, including woodburning stoves, accidental fires and burning of waste, along with natural sources, are also contributors. We need new powers at the national and local level accompanied by adequate resources to effectively address these sources.

How will we tackle it?

Tackling poor air quality is everyone's business and we all play a vital part: national agencies, local public services and Londoners themselves. We must therefore help our residents and businesses to understand the issue, its links to inequality and climate change, and how they can change their behaviour to make a positive difference, and ensure that they support interventions that are designed to protect their health. We recognise that technological development (e.g. the ability to work from home, and travel apps) is a major factor in changing the way in which residents and businesses use transport, and that it can be an ally in addressing reducing air pollution. We also recognise that policies need to be designed so that incentives and disincentives work in tandem to create the greatest impact and support behavioural change.

Contact us

We welcome engagement around our position statement, and you can contact us through Kate Hand (kate.hand@londoncouncils.gov.uk) or Joleene King (joleene.king@adphlondon.org.uk). Our full position statement can be found online: www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/lednet, or at http://adph.org.uk/networks/london/.