
Final Ministerial Reply



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The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP
From the Secretary of State

Thank you for your letter of the 1 August which was written with the Chair of the London Council's Transport and Environment Committee Cllr Catherine West.

I agree that air quality and reducing the significant health impacts of air pollution are shared priorities across all levels of Government and local administration as well as with Member States and the European Commission. To this end I am very pleased that you and London Boroughs have focused attention on this issue and (as you say with Government support) have taken steps to deliver important air quality benefits through the London Low Emission Zone, energy efficiency programmes, action to improve TfL bus standards and other measures.

I also welcome your ambition to establish an Ultra Low Emission Zone for London by 2020. This is indeed a very interesting development. The London Boroughs have also made an important contribution to raising the profile of air quality locally and to developing new and innovative approaches to tackling air pollution. Their role has been invaluable in improving understanding of local air quality and preparing local action plans to improve air quality.



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We do face significant challenges to make further improvements in air quality and I agree that we should continue to work together to investigate what actions can be taken. I have asked my officials to give consideration to the proposals you and Catherine outline. In relation to the particular matters you raise for my Department:

Clean Air Act: as you correctly point out the Clean Air Act is almost 60 years old. It is therefore being reviewed as part of Government's Red Tape Challenge initiative. Clearly, the review is looking at ways in which burdens on industry can be reduced, however, it is also considering how the legislation might help local authorities meet current air quality challenges. Later this month a Call for Evidence to support the review is to be issued. This aims to expose the review to a wider stakeholder base and fill some of the evidence gaps on burdens associated with Act. It will also provide stakeholders with an opportunity to comment on some of the suggestions for improvement already received and allow further ideas or comments to be submitted. The Call for Evidence will, in due course, be published on the Gov.UK webpages:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?publication_filter_option=consultations.

I should point out however that emissions from non-road mobile machinery are not within the scope of the Clean Air Act and are controlled by the European Directive on emissions from non-road mobile machinery engines (97/68/EC). This Directive is currently being revised by the Commission. Defra are working closely with DfT to negotiate the details of the revised Directive.

You also mention biomass, the combustion of which is expected to increase following the introduction of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme. In order to mitigate the risk to air quality arising from the increase, new legislation is being introduced in September which will require appliances accredited under the scheme to demonstrate compliance with stringent emission limits for particulate matter and oxides of nitrogen.

Defra Air Quality Grants Programme: This capital grants programme has been in place for over a decade and as you say provides valuable support to local measures and action to improve air quality. The grant for 2013/14 was £1 million and allocations for this year will be made shortly. We have continued to ensure priority is given to those authorities that have exceedences of the EU air quality limits or air quality management areas and this has meant that London Boroughs are likely to benefit significantly. Your commitment to match fund air quality grant where it goes to London is welcome and as you say should help to increase its impact. I note your arguments for having greater long term certainty for this grant. Given the continued challenge we face in public spending this and all other grant programmes are under intense scrutiny to ensure they provided continued value for money and are appropriately targeted.

Local Air Quality Management: With respect to local air quality management, as you will be aware we are in the process of consulting on changes to improve this system. The thrust of this review is to ensure that local authorities focus their air quality activities on action to improve air quality, making use of the best practice that is available to support this and working together and with other agencies to deliver improvements. The GLA and



London Boroughs provide excellent examples of best practice especially in relation to communications and business and public engagement. Practical measures such as anti-idling campaigns, cycling and walking initiatives and other measures are also to be commended. I agree that effective coordination of activities at different levels is key to achieving improvements in delivery. Your comments on the importance of air quality management areas and the role of local reporting and assessment will be taken into consideration in the development of our response to the current consultation.

You raise the issue of **noise and out-of-hours deliveries** and the trials of alternative working practices within Wandsworth. You point out the fact that these trials and feedback during the Olympics and Paralympics suggest that, if carried out properly, out-of-hours deliveries can be beneficial in reducing both day-time emissions and the local noise impact associated with night-time/early evening and morning deliveries.

Although, in general, out-of-hours deliveries were accepted during the Olympics and Paralympics, we did receive reports of some noise problems. We have also been monitoring the quiet delivery trials, liaising with both DfT and the Noise Abatement Society, who played a fundamental role in organising them. The results have been encouraging at the point of delivery, as long as all parties (the firm receiving the delivery, the lorry operator and the local authority environmental health team) worked closely together to minimise the impact.

However, as you are aware, people are more sensitive to noise at night and we are not convinced that the wider impact of additional noise at night from the inevitable extra freight traffic on the road network has been fully taken into account. So, we agree that out-of-hours deliveries are worth exploring but it is important that we avoid unintended consequences. We are aware that DfT are currently developing guidance for local authorities on out-of-hours deliveries, based on the trials in Wandsworth. We have asked DfT, and would now ask you, to help us to keep this issue under review.

Your letter also raises a number of matters for the Department of Transport and I note that you have copied it to Patrick McLoughlin. I understand that you have written to him directly regarding these and other transport matters. My Department has regular discussions with DfT and other Departments on air quality and we work closely with them to ensure air quality is taken into account in their policies.

With respect to incentives for ultra low emission vehicles, this Government is committed to promoting their early uptake. This was reflected in the recent infrastructure announcements which committed a further £500 million to making the UK a centre for growth in this industry. We also continue to provide incentives for EuroVI heavy duty vehicles through the reduced pollution certificate programme. Other fiscal incentives including VED are kept under review by the Treasury. I understand that Patrick McLoughlin has written to you with respect to retrofit standards, engine idling and the other matters in your letter.



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Thank you again for your commitment and that of the London Boroughs to improving air quality in London. I too look forward to continuing to work with you in this important area.

I have copied this letter to Patrick McLoughlin, Secretary of State for Transport.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Owen Paterson', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the bottom.

THE RT HON OWEN PATERSON MP