

Toolkit to support paediatricians approaching their local councils about air pollution

Produced by the RCPCH Climate Change Working Group, April 2022

This toolkit has been produced to support you to contact your councillors in your area around local elections. Note you're still able to contact your councillors if there isn't an election in your local area. Your MP, MSP or Welsh or Northern Ireland Assembly Members may also take an interest in air quality in their constituency.

Below you can read more on:

- Why a paediatrician should contact the council about air pollution
- Who your councillors are and how to contact them
- A suggested approach to contacting your candidates and how to prepare

Why should a paediatrician contact a council about air pollution?

- Air pollution is bad for child health. See air quality section of our [position statement on climate change](#), and our [outdoor air quality position statement](#).
- Air quality is not meeting WHO guidelines in most of the UK. See appendix for more detail.
- Air quality can be improved. Modelling shows the potential scale of resulting improvement in child asthma cases and adverse birth outcomes [Global study shows cutting carbon emissions and air pollution in cities has the potential to dramatically improve child health | LSHTM](#). Examples of positive impacts on child health documented when air pollution reduced include:
 - [Preterm birth after the Utah Valley Steel Mill closure: a natural experiment - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
 - [Differences in Birth Weight Associated with the 2008 Beijing Olympics Air Pollution Reduction: Results from a Natural Experiment - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
- Local councils have responsibilities for air quality.

Which council should I contact?

The organisation of councils varies across the UK. You can find out which council covers the area where you live and/ or work. You may want to contact both, and if you are contacting candidates/ councillors as a group from one workplace, you may even want to branch out to cover councils where your patients live.

You can find out who your councillors are here: <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council> or <https://www.writetothem.com>.

You can also find out who is running as a candidate in your local area here: <https://whocanivotefor.co.uk/>.

If you are writing as a group to a Council that isn't the one that covers where you live, you may want to reach out to the Council Leader or find out who on the Council has responsibility for the environment and contact them.

Should I act alone?

You are likely to have more impact as a group than as an individual (although even as an individual you have considerable potential impact as an advocate for child health, and you are not a lone voice when you are quoting position statements from the RCPCH).

Consider the local public health team as well as child health colleagues when forming an air quality advocacy group. See appendices for a list of some potential partners/collaborators – organisations already campaigning for clean air. You may find/form others, including local patient groups.

What approach should I/we take?

Councillors are more likely to warm to your approach if you can identify some things they are already doing well and offer to help them do more/better. The added value we can bring depends on how an individual council is currently performing.

You need to have done some homework on local air quality data and strategy (see below), and consider:

- Are the interventions the council is already engaged in/ planning likely to have significant/sufficient success in reducing air pollution? Is the main issue speeding up what they have already said they will do, or do they need to commit to more?
- Are they carrying local residents with them, or meeting with resistance e.g., to low emission zones, low traffic neighbourhoods etc.?
- If they are only reporting against the UK air quality objectives that now fall far short of the WHO guidance, are they aware that those objectives are inadequate to protect their population's health, and do their reports acknowledge that?
- Do they have enough monitors, and are they sited where they will pick up the air quality that local children (and pregnant women) are actually exposed to? Camden council is particularly active in increasing monitoring [The world's densest air quality network is coming to Camden - The Camden Clean Air Initiative](#)
- How active are the local public health team in liaison with the council on air quality? We should establish contacts.

Preparation

- Search online for the council's air quality management and find their latest annual report on air quality. This will include summary data, and their action plan to tackle the issue, e.g.
 - for Glasgow [Annual Progress Report \(glasgow.gov.uk\)](#)
 - for Lambeth [London Borough of Lambeth - Air Quality Annual Status Report 2020.pdf](#)
- Note 2020 data was unusual due to Covid lockdowns, so read the report for 2019 to get a more representative picture of usual air quality locally.
- Read the RCPCH position statements on climate change and on outdoor air quality.
- From the coroner reporting on the death of Ella Kissi Debrah, read [REGULATION 30: ACTION TO PREVENT FUTURE DEATHS \(judiciary.uk\)](#)
- Read appendices below – see table comparing air quality standards.

- Consider what local child health data or patient stories you may be able to bring, e.g. Asthma admissions, trends in birthweight and gestation.
- Consider reading [Air Quality Outside Schools in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: An Investigation into NO2 and PM Concentrations and PM Respiratory Deposition \(northumbria.ac.uk\)](#) . Note Newcastle City Council have since publicised their links with NHS consultants in [Calls to improve air quality outside homes and schools in Newcastle | Newcastle City Council](#), and now child health professionals in Newcastle are involved in advocacy work aimed at accelerating council actions.

Current data

If you are in Scotland, you can find air quality monitoring data here: [Air Quality in Scotland - latest data, forecasts and air quality information \(scottishairquality.scot\)](#) Under “latest and forecasts” there is a “local search” option where you can enter postcode region, e.g. for G20 it lists 27 monitoring sites within a 10 mile radius. By then selecting a site and clicking on “statistics” you can get summaries for each pollutant monitored, e.g. for PM2.5 annual hourly mean to date, maximum daily mean and maximum hourly mean so far this year <https://www.scottishairquality.scot/latest/site-info/GHSR>

On the UK Air website [Home - Defra, UK](#) there are reports and forecasts using classification of “low” “moderate” “high” but those bandings are broad, and e.g. PM2.5 is classed as “low” up to 35 µg m⁻³ when WHO hourly mean guideline figure is 15. If you click on Data then “get measured data and simple statistics” you can choose a network to search, then region, parameter and dates.

Other data sources:

- Air Quality England run by Ricardo Energy and Environment [About Air Quality England - Air Quality monitoring service](#)
- Non-statutory sources, e.g. Airly [#LetSchoolsBreathe | Air Quality Tracker Airly](#) have mapping here
- [Air Quality Map - Check air pollution in your area - MyAirly](#)

Potential partners/collaborators

[Clean Air Parents' Network](#)

[Mums for Lungs](#)

[Ella Roberta Family Foundation with Rosamund Kissi-Debrah](#)

[Choked Up \(@ChokedUp UK\) / Twitter](#)

[Air pollution - Our Children's Air \(ourchildrensair.life\)](#)

[Clean Air Fund](#)

[Global Action Plan: an environmental change charity, working for a green and thriving planet](#)

[Why do we need healthy air? - HealthyAir](#)

[Toxic air: we're all full of it | BHF](#)

APPENDIX

Current standards for air quality

Scotland has a new air quality strategy from 2021 [Cleaner Air for Scotland 2 - Towards a Better Place for Everyone - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) - aiming for Scotland to have the best air quality in Europe: see table below for differences in objectives of rest of the UK. The UK Clean Air Strategy dates from January 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-air-strategy-2019> . The Environment Act 2021 included a section on particulate matter <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/section/2> . The level and achievement date for targets will be set in secondary legislation. COMEAP [Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) advise DEFRA.

Pollutant	Measured as	Objective Scotland	Objective rest of UK	WHO air quality guideline level
Nitrogen Dioxide	1hour mean	200 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ not to be exceeded more than 18 times a year	200 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ not to be exceeded more than 18 times a year	200 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$
	Annual mean	40 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$	40 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$	10 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ (24 hour mean 25)
PM10	24 hour mean	50 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$, not to be exceeded more than 7 times a year	50 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$, not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year	45 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$
	Annual mean	18 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$	40 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$	15 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$
PM2.5	Annual mean	10 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ (limit)	25 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ (target)	5 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ as of 2021 (24 hour mean 15)
Sulphur dioxide	1 hour mean	350 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$, not to be exceeded more than 24 times a year	350 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$, not to be exceeded more than 24 times a year	200 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$
	24 hour mean	125 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$, not to be exceeded more than 3 times a year	125 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$, not to be exceeded more than 3 times a year	40 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$
	15 minute mean	266 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$, not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year	266 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$, not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year	10 minute mean 500 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$
Ozone	8 hourly running or hourly mean	100 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ not to be exceeded more than 10 times a year	100 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ not to be exceeded more than 10 times a year	100 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$
Carbon Monoxide	Running 8-hour mean	10.0 mg m^{-3}	? no objective	10.0 mg m^{-3} (24 hour mean 4)

Many/most councils are documenting levels of pollutants well above WHO air quality guideline levels.