

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: Outdoor and indoor air quality targets, HC 1411

Wednesday 6 September 2023

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Philip Dunne (Chair); Duncan Baker; Barry Gardiner; James Gray; Clive Lewis; Caroline Lucas; Cherilyn Mackrory; Dr Matthew Offord; Cat Smith.

Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee present: Mr Clive Betts.

Questions 167 - 211

Witnesses

I: Councillor Darren Rodwell, Chair, Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, Local Government Association; Councillor Deirdre Costigan, Acting Chair, Transport and Environment Committee, London Councils; Councillor Sarah Warren, Deputy Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Travel, Bath and North East Somerset Council; and Councillor Peter Schwier, Climate Czar and Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling, Essex County Council.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Local Government Association](#)

[London Councils](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Councillor Darren Rodwell, Councillor Deirdre Costigan, Councillor Sarah Warren and Councillor Peter Schwier.

[This evidence was taken by video conference]

Q167 **Chair:** Welcome to the Environmental Audit Select Committee for our third and final hearing in our short inquiry into outdoor and indoor air quality, a very topical subject at the moment.

We are very pleased to welcome to our Committee today as a guest Clive Betts, who is chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee. Welcome, Clive, and to our witnesses from local government. I will give a quick preamble before I introduce you, just to explain how it is that you are before us and others are not.

We very deliberately decided to hold this session following the conclusion of court action in relation to the introduction of ULEZ to the outer boroughs of London so that we could hear from representatives of the Mayor's Office and from outer boroughs. We invited the Deputy Mayor to join us today but unfortunately she is not able to join us, and the outer borough group cannot either, which may or may not be to do with the nature of that agreement. We are, however, very pleased that other local authorities and representatives of different groups in London have been able to join us today. I am going to invite each of you to introduce yourselves and explain the capacity in which you are here, and I will start with Peter Schwier. I am particularly pleased, Peter, that you have been able to join us because you have done so at very little notice.

Councillor Schwier: Thank you very much, Chair. I am Essex County Council's Climate Czar and Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling.

Councillor Rodwell: I am here in my capacity as a Local Government Association spokesman in this area.

Chair: Thank you. Which council do you represent?

Councillor Rodwell: The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, an outer London borough.

Councillor Costigan: I am here in my capacity as Acting Chair of the Transport and Environment Committee of London Councils. In my day job, as it were, I am the Deputy Leader of Ealing Council, also in outer London, where I am the Cabinet Member for Climate Action.

Chair: Thank you. We are also joined on the screen by Councillor Sarah Warren.



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Councillor Warren: I am the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Transport at Bath and North East Somerset Council and have been sent here through our connection with UK100.

Q168 **Chair:** Thank you all very much for joining us today. Starting with the helicopter view, the Government have set in legislation targets for air quality and appear to have sought to devolve the achievement of those targets very significantly down to local authority areas on the basic grounds that local authorities will know their areas better than the national Government for these matters. How does each of you feel that this approach works in practice or otherwise, trying to implement national policy through local government?

Councillor Rodwell: From the local government plans perspective, it seems like a bit of a mixed message because what is being devolved depends where you are in the country. If you are in mayoral areas, there is more devolution to those outside. At the same time, though, it is about the capacity of local authorities to be able to do the job, which has not come forth in terms of either finance or expertise. This is an area that needs particular expertise. While the Government are saying at one moment that they want us to take more responsibility, there is no additional funding or expertise coming in to help local authorities at a time when they are already finding it very difficult to do anything on top of all the other 300+ services they have to offer. Local authorities want to be active partners but they need to have a fair playground for us all to play in. At the moment, there is no common approach. It depends where you are in the country.

Q169 **Chair:** We will come on to funding quite specifically in a minute, so could we perhaps touch on the achievement of the targets and how they are calculated and communicated to the local area.

Councillor Warren: Bath and North East Somerset Council was the first charging clean air zone to go live outside London so in many ways we had a very close working relationship with the Joint Air Quality Unit as that change came in and we were very fortunate—perhaps being the first council—we were reasonably well funded for the change, for the implementation of the clean air zone. I do understand, though, that in other ways there are competitive funding approaches and so on. To have a clear national message that is based on evidence, a clean air strategy, would be very helpful.

Councillor Costigan: Air quality is obviously not something we could build a ring round my borough, Ealing, for, for example, and say that we are going to sort it out here and forget about the rest of the country. By its very nature, what we do around air quality is something that we have to think of nationally. However, there are, of course, elements that need to be devolved and we do a lot of work, for example, on electric vehicle charging. That is one example of the local work that we do. However, there must be an overall national ambition that we can all work towards so we are all working in a coherent and consistent manner. I think that is what is perhaps lacking at the moment.



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Added to that, of course, is that in order to have real devolution we have to have the powers to work to targets and implement actions that will make a difference, and there is an issue with us not having the right powers at the moment. I am sure the Committee will want to go on to that and investigate it further.

Another area of concern is resources. After devolving power and giving us additional powers, we need the money to do the work and that is another sticking point.

There are some issues with the communication of even existing targets. It is not entirely clear to local councils what our role is. "Road map" is probably not the right term to use when we talk about air quality, but we need to know what the road map is to achieving the new targets that the Government have set, which still are not the WHO targets; they are lesser. We are still not clear about what is expected of us in even achieving those targets.

Q170 **Chair:** Is there any dialogue with government about the road map, as you say, to the targets?

Councillor Costigan: I think there ought to be a lot more. There is certainly insufficient dialogue. I think you will be looking at the recent strategy consultation. We would have liked to have a dialogue around that, for example, but even with that there was a very short consultation period, probably about three weeks.

Councillor Rodwell: We were given 10 days.

Councillor Costigan: Yes, we were given 10 days to respond, in fact, and from a London council's perspective, we were only able to send in a two-page letter giving an overview of our perspective. We are not able to have a proper dialogue on all the issues raised in the consultation because 10 days, in a pre-election period, I believe, as well, was just not enough. You cannot have a dialogue in that context. There is a lot more work to be done on communication and how we collaborate and work together if we do want to achieve. We are trying to address a public health crisis, are we not, and I think everyone wants to work together to do it, but there is a lot more to do to put the structures in place to allow that to happen.

Councillor Schwier: I agree with a lot of what has been mentioned already, but I think a national air quality strategy is important so that we all know the levels and expectations that we can work to. Obviously, air pollution moves so it cannot be just at district or county level but country if not continent-wide. We are aware of our geositions, but national guidelines would be good to enable us to work together.

I agree with the comment about the potential power of devolution to help us work together and collaborate on the targets. That is important. At the county level, we also have district, which fronts a lot of this, and I think we need clarity on that. Clarity is also important for the long term



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because this is a health issue, which is as we know incredibly important to us all in every moment of our lives.

Q171 **Chair:** We have had a lot of pretty stark evidence from Chief Medical Officer Whitty from a health perspective and the Committee has taken a lot of that on board.

You mentioned the localised nature. We know that there are significant hotspots and we will come on to traffic issues a bit later in the session. From a London perspective am I right—I am not sure quite where I have heard this—that it is the case that the impact of Heathrow means that western boroughs of London are not meeting their air quality targets but without the influence of Heathrow they might be?

Councillor Costigan: I am not sure that is entirely the case. Take my borough of Ealing for example. I think there are six or seven areas that are not currently meeting targets, and in those areas the problem is mainly due to the impact of traffic. We have some big, busy roads running through the borough. We are just about to publish our air quality strategy in Ealing—we published a draft version earlier in the year—and there is a great map in it that shows the air pollution hotspots in the borough, which go along the A14, the Uxbridge Road and a bit around an industrial area in Acton. Road travel is still the biggest contributor to air pollution in London, I think.

Councillor Rodwell: If I can take it from an east London perspective, completely away from Heathrow, the A13, which carries 80% of London's freight from the ports, has the third-worst air quality in London and is in the top 10 in the country. Again, nothing to do with Heathrow. It has very much to do with traffic pollution.

Q172 **Chair:** You touched on the air quality strategy and the short time you had for the consultation. Is it helping? Is the output from that strategy moving the debate forward in a constructive or helpful way?

Councillor Schwier: Could I comment on that because we are also looking at an air quality strategy in Essex? However, I would like to move the conversation to the standards we are adopting. While I accept the standards that the Committee is listening to today and considering, I think we ought to go higher, especially with PM_{2.5}, to the WHO standard so that across the nation, potentially, we can have a universal standard that everybody could work to. Aiming for a higher standard is potentially to the benefit of not only us in Essex but for us all in the long term.

Q173 **Chair:** Is that view shared?

Councillor Rodwell: It is. The LGA would look at that as the standard we should be aiming for.

Councillor Costigan: The response we sent through from the London councils, which was agreed by them all, was exactly that, that we would like to see the standard raised to the WHO guideline. That is a shared belief.



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Councillor Warren: Yes, I agree that the air quality strategy goes some way but we would prefer to be moving towards the World Health Organisation targets in a clear road map to 2030. In Bath and North East Somerset, we have indicated that we would like to aspire to more demanding goals than the nationally set target of 40 micrograms per cubic metre of nitrogen dioxide and have said in the first instance we will work towards 36 as a stepping stone. It would be very helpful, however, to have a very clear and evidence-based national messaging strategy and I hope that could be cross-party. We can all agree on the evidence. Let's have some clear messaging.

Chair: This is a cross-party Committee and we will endeavour to ensure that we have consensus with the recommendations we make to Ministers.

Councillor Schwier: I would add that while I think there seems to be general agreement on that level and it would be very useful coming from this Committee now and in future, having that ambition is one thing but it would be very good to have guidance on how to achieve it because that is going to be very important. I think we would probably all agree about that. Set us an ambitious standard, which will benefit the country, but at the same time indicate how it can be achieved.

Councillor Rodwell: That is very important. There is no council, no matter what political party's flag they fly under, that does not want to make this happen, but we do need the right sentiment from the national Government to make sure that we can all play our part. If we are talking about the Greater London Authority, politics have got in the way. We are talking about people's lives here, whether in London or Manchester, wherever it may be. We have to make sure that the air quality is the best it can be for all.

Chair: We have some London MPs on the Committee and I am sure they may wish to give some views on that. Thank you very much.

Q174 **Barry Gardiner:** I want to focus on the powers and responsibilities. My colleague Clive Betts will focus on the funding. I appreciate that you may think those things are very intricately linked, but perhaps you could try to wait on the funding aspect until Clive Betts comes in.

I want to thank you all for the leadership you and your local authorities are showing on this issue and for the cross-party nature of the way in which you are showing we can move forward if the will is there.

Councillor Rodwell, in your capacity in the Local Government Association, you are dealing with matters right across the country. What responsibilities and powers do local authorities currently have to address air pollution—I do not call it air quality; it is air pollution—and how would you like to see those powers increased? Please be as specific as you can.

Councillor Rodwell: The powers we have are not clear; I think that is the best way of describing them. We do not have the expertise in local government to work on this in a finite way and that is an issue for us. We need that expertise but it is very hard to say exactly what we need



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because every area is different. The expertise they need in Essex will be different from what they need in a capital city, in a rural area or anywhere in one of our core cities. It is hard, therefore, for me to say that there is one answer to it all. What would probably be best would be if there were some scenarios that you were asking for and we could tell you what we would need. London councils would say something different from what the LGA would be saying about what we would ask for our members. I am sorry that I cannot give you a specific answer but there isn't one.

Barry Gardiner: Sarah and Deirdre had their hands up on specificity so could I go to Councillor Warren first?

Councillor Warren: I do have some specifics; for example, if we wanted to tackle PM_{2.5} through doing more about wood burners, we do not currently have powers to regulate what fuel is burnt or even to restrict the sale of damp wood. Take gas boilers in people's homes, which of course put nitrogen dioxide into the atmosphere. Again, we do not have powers or clarity from government or any ability to go into people's homes and ask them to change their gas boilers.

I would then go back to transport. Outside of London, the public transport position is quite different. Our local supported bus network in Bath and North East Somerset is in many ways on the point of collapse. We do not have a tube system. We do not have the powers to put alternatives to the car in place.

Barry Gardiner: I know that bus services are something that my colleague Clive Betts has been going on about for a very long time and he may want to pick up on that. Councillor Costigan, yes.

Councillor Costigan: We do have some powers but the Clean Air Act 1993, for example—there are a few different pieces of legislation that our environmental health officers would rely on—is outdated and does not take into account new technologies and new sources of air pollution so it really does need to be looked at again.

Our environmental health officers will respond to residents' complaints if residents have a worry about a particular site that they think air pollution is coming from, and when we look at our data if there are air pollution hotspots they will look at those things. However, the issue is, as Sarah Warren has pointed out, that, stepping back, the targets that we spoke about earlier are the problem because unless we have targets that are strong enough to ensure that people cannot continue to pollute our air, our officers cannot take any action. It starts with the targets and then comes to the powers.

The threshold is the important point. When somebody calls one of our officers, we often have to go back and say they have not exceeded any thresholds and it is the exceedances that give our officers the power. If we cannot evidence that, the officers cannot do very much. We need to have an emissions reduction Bill. There is one currently in the House of



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Lords, a private Member's Bill from Lord Tope, I think, and that is about giving us stronger powers to be able to hit people with fixed penalty notices for some of the examples that Sarah Warren gave so that we could go into a polluting industry and say, "You have to stop doing this and here is a fixed penalty notice because you have not listened to us previously". We cannot do that now. A new legislation, something along the lines of that, would help us to act in that area.

We also do not have enough strings to our bows when it comes to planning legislation. We are not able in, say, planning guidance to be as strong as we would like to be with construction sites and new industries being established to ensure that if there is a new development, any impact on air pollution is mitigated or even, as we have with the SILs, for example, that if they absolutely cannot avoid polluting, there is some funding that comes back to the council so that we are able to take mitigating action elsewhere in the borough to make up for the impact. We have some limited powers. The problem is that they are not strong enough. They do not allow us to hit people with those fines, in many cases, for the air pollution that probably worries our residents the most. That is the kind of thing that we get complaints about.

Councillor Schwier: I agree with the comments just made. The importance of planning must not be underrated. For all new industries and developments, the point about being able to mitigate or design out air pollution is very important, as in having green spaces and how to change buildings if they are close to a vehicle highway of one sort or another.

There is another important point here. Talking about resources, we are different from the London boroughs but we have much larger locations. We also have to be very careful about the avoidance of the perception of pollution. That is why we need to have good quality monitoring and to be able to prove what our levels are because we need that data. If we have that data, we can act. Without it, pollution is a perception and that could cause us some problems, so national guidelines and some help with that would be very useful.

Q175 **Barry Gardiner:** That is helpful, all the things you have said about the framework of the national strategy, where there are clear targets—whether pinned to the WHO guidance or otherwise—but clear targets giving you the detailed powers to enforce on those targets. We will come on to resource for monitoring and so on. That is very helpful. Thank you.

If I can turn to Councillor Warren, I think you are representing UK100 here today; is that correct?

Councillor Warren: Yes.

Barry Gardiner: UK100 has said that there is a failure from central Government to support the necessary partnership with local government. Could you elaborate on that?



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Councillor Warren: If we have a comprehensive clean air strategy that sets out very clearly what the targets are and aligns them in every case with powers and funding and clarity at all levels and with all councils all round the country—it is very much in line with what the other contributors have said. There just needs to be more clarity across the board.

Barry Gardiner: Okay. More clarity and greater levers to implement them?

Councillor Warren: Yes.

Q176 **Barry Gardiner:** Finally from me, under the air quality strategy, the Government have said—well, they blamed local authorities for failing to reduce PM_{2.5} pollution sufficiently and they have suggested that they might introduce a standalone legal duty on authorities to reduce emissions. First, is it a fair characterisation of local authorities and would you welcome such a standalone legal duty if it came with the corresponding powers and resources?

Councillor Warren: That does not seem to me to be entirely fair. I have already mentioned the example of wood burners, which put out PM_{2.5}, and even in a clean air zone where we are upgrading vehicles, the most modern petrol engines and even electric vehicles put out particulates from their brakes and their tyres. Without any real ability to provide alternatives to the car, the characterisation of the situation we are in now is tricky.

I am sure you have spoken to technical people but, as I understand it, some of those particulates travel very long distances as well, from Europe and so on, from Spanish fires, for example, so how a local authority can be held responsible for fires in Spain is very difficult to understand. Equally, if we can have some clear targets and clear information about what the relationship is to distant contributors of particulates and then have the appropriate powers and funding, that would certainly help us to be clear about exactly what our responsibilities are.

Councillor Schwier: I will bring the conversation back to those national guidelines, which will be very important. As we have just heard, air pollution moves and may do so considerably, depending on the conditions, and I think we are all very much aware of that. Yes, obviously, local government at all levels would like to help but we need the resources and the ability, which includes technical ability. Air pollution is quite a technical subject and we need to have the resources and the ability. Once we know about it, we also need to have people who technically can cope with it.

Councillor Rodwell: I agree with everything that has been said. Our problem is that we have not dealt with this with a long-term view. There has been no long-term funding for the issue. Local authorities have been, in effect, asked to chase the money and that does not give us the



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national outcome that we need. That is important. Even if you look at the funding that had been given—

Barry Gardiner: Let me stop you on the funding because I know Clive Betts—

Councillor Rodwell: I was going to say that if you want the right strategy, it has to come with long-term funding and expertise, which local government is ready to embrace. Without it, we are always one step behind what we are being asked to do.

Councillor Costigan: Regarding a legal requirement, I suppose we already have a legal duty on us to look after the wellbeing of the people who live in our boroughs and we obviously prioritise our resources in order to achieve that. To some degree, however, having that legal duty without the powers in particular, and the resources specifically, the legal requirement would be more like window dressing than addressing the problem. I am here speaking on behalf of London Councils and I might have to discuss this in more detail, but my initial feeling is that it would not do everything that we would need it to do.

To the point that my colleague made regarding technical expertise, a lot more data and information is needed, particularly about indoor air quality. We really do not know what impact it is having on people. As Sarah Warren said earlier, we are not inside people's houses so we cannot measure it. We need a lot more from government to be able to understand it. That is national research that needs to be planned and there needs to be a full programme of that as well.

Q177 **Mr Clive Betts:** Funding for local councils is very much in the public arena again today. We know local councils are in financial difficulties. Are you looking for more specific funding for delivering air quality programmes or simply more funding for your council in general so you can give priority to them? Is there an approach that you want to see?

Councillor Rodwell: We want a truly sustainable approach. As a Local Government Association, we have been saying for quite a while that local government is not funded enough. That is putting extra pressure on all councils but, of course, this is a specific problem that the Government signed up to in COP26. We were there. We celebrated it in Glasgow. We need specific funding for this issue.

I was coming on to the short-term funding that has been given to us. Of the 330 local authorities that bid for the money, only 40 got any, so what happened to the other 290 authorities that wanted to play their part? Of course, we need to look at local government funding generally because there have been some alarming reports recently that local government is in crisis, but we certainly need to look at this specific case because this is a global crisis.

Q178 **Mr Clive Betts:** An additional point first and then other councillors can follow. If you had a situation where you had more specific targets and very clear responsibilities, would you have a better case to go to the



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Government and say this is a new burden that we can quantify the cost of and, therefore, get specific funding for it?

Councillor Costigan: That is definitely what we would need to do. We are certainly banging the drum for additional powers, but of course we know that we would need specific funding to be able to deliver on those powers. For example, if we did have the power to use fixed penalty notices, we would need to pay people to investigate, to spend that time and to go out and enforce, so we would certainly ask for specific funding for any additional powers we received.

Darren Rodwell has made the point about the current funding. I think it was about £6 million for the whole country. In my borough, we were lucky enough. We got about a quarter of a million, I think, about £200,000-something, to do some of this work, but all that allows us to do is—

Mr Clive Betts: What was it for? Could you specify?

Councillor Costigan: What that allows us to do is to put air quality monitors on I think six schools, putting them in the schools to check in particular the impact of air quality on children's health, and to also do some education work. That is about bringing residents along with us so they understand air quality issues. It is a drop in the ocean, isn't it, when you think about what we need to do? It is a smaller, piecemeal project. It is not a strategic approach to the massive air quality problem that we face. There needs to be more funding. It needs to be more strategic and not for funding those smaller-scale projects.

There is also an issue in local government with a reduction in the technical expertise and the lack of environmental health officers. It is very hard to recruit people into the job because, in all honesty, we have been losing environmental health officers for the last decade or so with the squeeze on local government funding. It was not necessarily seen as a career of choice. Why would you go into a job that looked like it was dying? All of a sudden we do need these people again and it is going to be quite hard to get them, even if we do the funding, so there also needs to be funding for training people to work in this area because we will need them in future.

Another area that I wanted to raise in terms of funding is permitting. You asked at the beginning, Chair, about the job of an environmental health officer. One of the things we do is give people permits to allow them to do things that might result in air pollution. That is the job of local government. We look at an application and say, for instance, "There might be some pollution as a result of this but it is a limited amount, it is within the greater levels that we allow, and you can only do it at this time of the day or you have to make sure that you have all these mitigating factors in place". That is what we do and we agree a permit.

However, the fees and charges for those permits have not increased for the last number of years, so we are effectively giving free advice and



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assistance to developers to try to reduce the impact on local people and we are not being properly reimbursed for that. We are not covering our costs. We are having to take that money out of where we spend most of our money, older people and children's social care. That is where we have to take that money from if we are not getting it from the Government. That is another issue. We need to charge and we are not currently able to charge any more. We need to fully charge back that cost to developers who are causing pollution and are seeking a permit. They need to pay for the cost of local government staff.

Q179 Mr Clive Betts: We will move on—and other councillors please come in as well—but some additional points from there: would the ability to issue additional fixed penalty notices help with revenue or would that simply cover costs?

A second point: I know a problem that certainly exists is if you take court action against breaches, the courts often simply do not give local authorities back the full cost of having to take that case and all the associated work. Is that something else that we ought to be thinking about raising? I understand it is a problem in lots of areas of local government. Do the other councillors want to come in?

Councillor Schwier: Can I quickly come in on the question of funding and what has already been raised on funding? For long-term change in air quality, the current process of just bidding for funding is not in the long-term interests of achievement. I think that funding should be very long term so that local authorities can make adjustments and employ the expertise, knowledge and staffing levels that have been mentioned that are needed to attain what we are talking about.

Mr Clive Betts: Councillor Warren, do you want to come in? I think that Councillor Rodwell wants to come back on the courts issue.

Councillor Warren: I will endorse the comments about bidding not being sustainable, especially if you are going to try to recruit people in this role for life, taking on training to undertake a very specialist career. If powers are not to be devolved, it should be that the relevant amount of funding comes automatically to local authorities rather than them having to bid.

Councillor Rodwell: I agree with that but I was just going to answer your question about the courts. I am not aware of any court that has given us back the money we have spent on enforcement in this area and that goes for the Environment Agency, too. We have had mixed messages there. As local authorities, we are responsible for some of it; the rest is for the Environment Agency. We try to have conversations with the Environment Agency, which makes it very difficult. We know it is falling through the gaps. A much more stringent local approach would help us all in both operational and enforcement terms.

Q180 Chair: Picking up on the point about competitive funding, I think Deirdre Costigan mentioned that only 40-something councils had secured funding, and this was to do measurement. Does that mean that councils



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that did not get the funding—I do not know if any of you represent councils that did not get funding. What happens in those circumstances?

Councillor Rodwell: We just go with what we have and do the bare minimum. We do what is being asked of us as best we can when we have a funding crisis. We will carry on trying to do what we have said we will do.

Q181 **Barry Gardiner:** This question is to elicit from you whether you think this is a sensible way to allocate funding, to put you in competition with each other. I would have thought that bigger authorities that are better funded probably have the resources to make those bids, whereas smaller councils that may not have the funding to put such bids together end up suffering, even though their problem might be greater.

Councillor Rodwell: The Local Government Association believes that long-term, strategic funding for all is better than individual bids when one authority can do better than another. That is not a fair playing field.

Councillor Costigan: It also means that we have environmental health officers who could be out doing the job sitting around instead, filling in forms and trying to be innovative and clever and beat the borough next door, which does not help anybody.

Q182 **Chair:** You mentioned that you receive six measuring devices for schools. Did you place any of them indoors or were they all outdoors?

Councillor Costigan: I could not give you the exact location of where they are and what the situation is with them, but most of the funding—even though we did put some air quality monitors in—is about education and trying to work with local people to get them to understand a bit more about air quality. For example, we are shortly going to be putting up a website where people can put in the details of where they live and look at air quality issues in our borough and understand a little bit more about what the drivers are.

That is really the question that the Committee looked at at the beginning, helping people to understand that road traffic is one of the biggest issues in our area so people see why other things that the council does make sense and are trying to assist with that. For example, when we are bringing in electric vehicle charging points and people complain because they are losing parking, we want them to try to understand why we are doing that so that we can address the air quality issue, which we know is massive for our residents. It is one of the top issues that people worry about in London. They do want us to do something about it but we need some education so they understand that the things we are doing are linked to fixing it.

Q183 **Caroline Lucas:** Most outdoor air quality targets are set at a national rather than a local level. Given that some areas are obviously finding it easier to meet targets than others, this has led some people to suggest that there should be specific targets for outdoor pollutants made locally or regionally rather than a national one. What is your response to that?



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Councillor Rodwell: There should be a national framework that local authorities can work within but it should be looked at at a local level because the experts are local, by and large. I border on London but I am also Essex. Where we are, we are a very post-industrial area and we would have different targets from Essex, where they would have their own targets, but it should all be within one framework. We need to have the World Health Organisation as the main target but different in different places.

Q184 **Caroline Lucas:** If you are in a place that has a much lower target, even if there is an overarching, more positive national target, how does that help you with your asthma if you are in a place where, for whatever reason, a target might be set that is lower than the national target?

Councillor Rodwell: The problem at the moment is that we are not setting anywhere near to the WHO target anyway. If I take this as a local, I live in an area, I have asthma, smoker's lung, though I have never smoked in my life, because I've lived in an area that has always had such a high level of pollution. As local authorities, we are now taking this seriously and are trying to bring down those targets and trying to do that in many different ways. We are working with the Mayor's Office when it comes to ULEZ, which has been a particular issue in outer London. We know what our responsibilities are but it is something that the public cannot see so it is always going to be more difficult.

Going back to it, we want perfect targets that work everywhere and if you have an illness then, of course, you want targets to be even better in those locations. I know my mother has COPD. She cannot come back to my borough for more than a weekend without going on a nebuliser. She lives in Lincolnshire now. She retired there 30 years ago for the reason that the air quality is so bad in my borough.

I would say to you that you are right in your analysis but at the moment we are failing everyone, no matter what those targets are, because they are not consistent and they are not high enough to support people.

Q185 **Caroline Lucas:** Can I go to Councillor Costigan on a particular point? We did receive some evidence from Client Earth, for example, who would say that if you were to go down the route of setting different local and regional targets, there would be a danger of confusion and divergent regional approaches.

Councillor Costigan: Overall, I think everyone is entitled to decent air and that has to be fundamental, doesn't it? We are all entitled, and a line has to be drawn that tells you what is and what is not acceptable and every area of the country needs to get over that line eventually. I think what the WHO has done is set interim targets so that you can maybe achieve the interim target but not quite achieve the full target yet, and it gives you additional time to do that.

What we do have to understand is that the people who are experiencing the lowest levels of air quality are often the poorest and most deprived people, so we certainly have to ensure that we do more work in those



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areas. It is not so much about having different targets, it is about targeting resources and prioritising some of the areas that have the worst air quality outcomes and making sure that we put the investment into those areas. Often you will find some main roads might have people on lower incomes living on them, perhaps in flats above shops, that kind of thing, and that is where the air quality is going to be the most concerning.

We need to do targeted work locally rather than having a collection of different targets in different places. We need the overall target that we are all working towards so that everyone can have a decent standard of air.

Caroline Lucas: Councillor Warren, did you want to add anything?

Councillor Warren: As I mentioned, we have gone some way to start to set our own local target that is a little tighter than the national one because we want to aspire higher. Clearly, there is no safe level of these pollutants. There could be an argument for asking those places where the air is cleaner to aspire higher while supporting those where the air is more polluted, but equally I think the importance of a clear message is vital. If Client Earth's view is that is going to muddy the waters in terms of messaging, it may be that on the other hand clarity across the board, common messaging across the board, and support for councils to aspire high, encouraging them to aspire high across the board, is the way to go.

Caroline Lucas: Is there anything from you, Councillor Schwier?

Councillor Schwier: I agree with the idea of a national framework but, of course, what is important is the local knowledge. In Essex, we know Essex extremely well and I quite agree with the comments about sometimes where the poorest people are has the worst air pollution, but to be able to find that out again brings a question about resources to be able to monitor the air pollution.

Caroline Lucas: I have that. The question was about whether or not we want regional targets.

Councillor Schwier: Regional targets would give us the agility to be able to respond, work accordingly and put the resources there for it. In Essex, we are old and we are also 62% rural so we need to have that flexibility and agility; hence that knowledge and expertise; hence the monitoring and data.

Q186 **Caroline Lucas:** My second question is a bit more specific and you have touched on it a little already in some of the scenarios you have outlined. The question is: how well placed, with their current funding and powers, are local authorities in England to reach specifically the PM_{2.5} target of 10 micrograms by 2030 rather than the DEFRA goal of 2040? One of the reasons I ask is that we had the Secretary of State say very clearly that she does not believe that it is possible for everywhere to meet that target. I know you introduced yourselves as all aspiring to that target,



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which is great, but she says that there is no chance at all, with the best will in the world, and we cannot achieve that everywhere by the end of the decade. She rules out London in particular, and I know that the Mayor of London has a different view. Councillor Costigan, where would you start?

Councillor Costigan: Certainly, London councils believe that we can achieve it by 2030 and that is why we responded to the consultation in that regard. We do believe that we can achieve it by 2030, but your question was, “with the resources and powers that you currently have”, and that is the issue. That is the stumbling block. It may be that the Minister is answering a different question than perhaps I am answering. If we had that funding and those powers we could do it, and we have been absolutely up front about that cross-party, that we are up for doing it. We want to do it. We are keen to do it. We are ambitious for London and London’s air but we do need to have the tools to get us there. That is the sticking point at this moment.

Q187 **Caroline Lucas:** In your reply to my colleague earlier, you set out a range of tools that would be useful to have, in a general sense. Is there something specific when we are looking at the PM_{2.5} target? If you were to try to identify one or two key powers that would be most helpful for that, is there something that would come to your mind?

Councillor Costigan: Yes. All these things are detailed, aren’t they? It is not specifically one slight amendment to existing legislation, for example, and that is why I think that the Bill that I mentioned earlier, the emissions reduction Bill, which is specifically for London, would give us some of the powers we need to act against polluting industries and some of those finer particles that we do not necessarily have the powers to deal with now. Some of our air quality legislation was written before we fully understood the damage that some of these particles do to our health and we were more focused on other areas of air quality. I think there needs to be a modernisation of the legislation, but in particular that emissions Bill would allow us to act against polluting industries and PM_{2.5} and enforce, using fixed penalty notices, which we cannot currently do.

Q188 **Caroline Lucas:** Going to Councillor Rodwell, I want to ask how significant you think transboundary issues are. How much do transboundary issues come into whether or not you feel that it is fair to ask particular local authorities to meet certain standards?

Councillor Rodwell: I think they are a major issue. Pollution does not stay in one place. The fires that happened on the continent affected air quality in the UK. As the Local Government Association family, we are saying we have to be judged fairly according to the resources that we have and the situation we find ourselves in. We are worried. What we do not want is another league table—you have done well; you have not done well; we are going to condemn you for not doing well—when every local authority has shown a passion to want to change their air quality in their locality.

Caroline Lucas: Councillor Schwier, do you have anything to add?



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Councillor Schwier: Yes. I think getting to PM_{2.5} is going to be a difficult job, as we all know. It is not going to be easy. I also think that sometimes we are talking about it in the wrong way because we are talking about when we know the pollution is there. Surely it would be important to try to design that pollution out before it happens. Should we not start looking at industry, looking at, say, car manufacturing, which is well known as a source of PM_{2.5}? Should we not start thinking differently, preventing pollution before spending a fortune and all the associated resources on improving our air quality? Let's try to prevent it rather than clearing it up. I think there is an opportunity there now. We could look at doing that now. This is why meetings like this, and collaboration, are going to be so important because we all want clean air.

Caroline Lucas: I am mindful of the time. Councillor Warren, I do not know if you have anything specific to add.

Councillor Warren: Not particularly.

Q189 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** I want to start talking about traffic control measures. I think we all agree that road pollution is probably the most important pollutant that we are trying to talk about today. Could you outline if that is not the case in your areas and if it is something else? No. Okay. Great.

Councillor Rodwell, you talked very elaborately about what resources you need, the powers that you need, and you have obviously had extensive conversations with LGA colleagues on this. What would be the bill to the Government if you were to get the funding for local government that you think we need around the country to tackle this problem?

Councillor Rodwell: It would be a number of different measures. Some of what we need in London you are already seeing, led by the Mayor. I think that is clear. He has had a very strong agenda on this. In other parts of the country there will be different needs and different requirements.

Q190 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** Has any analysis been done?

Councillor Rodwell: I would not be able to tell you that today. I do not have that detail to hand and it would be wrong of me to say otherwise. Looking at what they have done in Bristol, Manchester and London—core cities—there has been a lot of work, good work, showing that air quality is an important factor and they have been leading the way on it. I would ask the Government to look at that work and see how they could help build on it. That would have to be for the betterment of all the local government family.

Q191 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** Is it just the issues that we have raised today—the perceived lack of government support in funding and other things—that are your stumbling blocks? Or, when you do get the go-ahead—let's be honest—what is public support like? I think everybody can see that we want to get to the same end, but when it comes to your day-to-day existence, trying to get in and out and you are used to using your



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vehicles, particularly if you use them for a business, how much of a problem is that lack of public support potentially?

Councillor Rodwell: Our UK100 colleague wants to come in first.

Councillor Warren: I don't mind but I think that the clearer the messaging from Government about the importance of this issue for people's own public health, the more support we can build among the public. Sometimes these issues get used and somewhat weaponised and I think that is not helpful. It is very important that we take the cross-party approach that we are taking today, that we look at the evidence and build national-level communications and public engagement and public teaching programmes. Then, anything that local government does will be just seen as a cog in that bigger wheel. It will just be part of what people come to expect. We have had national programmes of education around smoking that have been enormously successful. Maybe this is the way forward for this issue, too, and we can overcome those difficulties.

Of course, if we are asking people to change what they do every single day, their routines, that is challenging and it is difficult, but with sufficient—first of all—education and then putting alternatives in place, support from government through powers and funding to have alternatives that are practical and are in place, I think we can do it.

Q192 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** If I were to push you on that—apologies for doing this, just playing devil's advocate in the room if I may—if you have a business where you drive a van, for example, and you need to go through these areas and you are a sole trader and you cannot upgrade to the latest electric van, how, as local government leaders, can you bring that person along with you? How do you do that? How do you go about doing that?

Councillor Warren: In Bath as part of our clean air zone, we were fortunate to receive a £9-million pot of funding from the Government to support such people in upgrading their vehicles to more modern ones, not electric, necessarily, but more modern petrol and diesel vans that were less nitrogen-dioxide emitting. We understand that plenty of people need to carry stuff for their jobs and a van will often be the most appropriate vehicle and they need to come into the zone and that is perfectly reasonable.

There will also be instances where the more modern and larger cargo bikes are the thing that people could use. Have scrappage schemes available, appropriately funded for local authorities, just as ours was through the clean air zone project, where people could scrap their vehicles and upgrade them, whether with vans or something else that would do the job just as well. That is the support that we need.

Cherilyn Mackrory: Would anybody else like to add anything on that?

Councillor Costigan: There are many measures we could take on air pollution. There is a gamut of them. The question is: how much money do we need? It really covers so much. So much of what we do is about



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fighting air pollution, but one area that I think we have been hugely successful with and where people support the work we do is in the implementation of school streets, which are areas outside schools where the roads are closed at school drop-off time and pick-up time. In my own borough, for example, we have 21 school streets at the moment and a promise to have 50 in the next couple of years. Across the board we have had support from staff and from the kids, parents and local residents.

It is not just about safety. Safety is very important, it is about safety, too, so kids feel safe on that last bit to school, but it is also about encouraging parents to help their kids to walk to school, to scoot to school, to cycle to school. It is amazing when we open them how excited everyone is, how much they love it, and they make the connection between that and air pollution. They understand the link and that this is making a difference. We add it to the curriculum in the schools so that the kids themselves can understand about air pollution. We find then that they go to the parents and say, "Why are you idling outside the supermarket? Turn off your engine" or, "Should we look at our car? What should we be doing?" It is also about instilling in a new generation a greater understanding of the damage we are all doing to ourselves, living in the dirty-air environment that we live in at the moment.

Councillor Schwier: I think that school streets are important because not only are we talking about parents but children. Children are the next upcoming generation and it is important that they understand what we are trying to achieve.

In Essex, outside a couple of schools now we do not have normal bollards, we have pencil bollards, and they work very well, helping not only the children but the adults, too. Awareness of what is being achieved for air pollution is important. On planning, when you are designing new schools design them so that the drop-off is not in the school but some way away, maybe in a green park, a green space. Car-sharing schemes are important, too. There are lots of opportunities to help but those are a couple to mention.

Councillor Rodwell: You mentioned specifically vehicles, vans and sole traders. Remember that there is a tax system where they can claim back what is being asked of them, so ultimately we pay. Education about that needs to be more pronounced. That has been a big objection, especially in the outer London boroughs, as I know from my own. It is about that long-term funding. We need to have those conversations. It is like the school streets. Because we had the conversations on the ground with the people who it affected, no matter whether you are rural or in the cities, people have responded because they understand the challenge that we are trying to address. The problem was that because we did not have that long-term fix—we came out of Covid, we had LTNs and school streets imposed on us in the first instance by Government because they had signed up to COP26, which we all agreed with—we were not able to have those conversations.



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What we need to look at is how we fund the transition for those who need it. For those who cannot afford it right now, how do we make sure we alleviate some of that? When you think about the subsidy that we get in fuel duty and car tax, there is a lot of money there that should have been reinvested into the new structures that we need for the country.

Q193 Cherilyn Mackrory: If I can just follow this on slightly, I am a school mum and I live rurally. I go somewhere, drop the kids off and have to go straight off to work. A lot of the policies that you have just outlined are—I am going to use the phrase “anti-car”. I do not mean to be aggressive with that, but it is anti-vehicle. If everybody was suddenly to get electric vehicles—and you did mention some pollutants from tyres, brakes and everything, but surely that has to be minimal compared to where we are now—would those policies stay in place because we all feel like we are in a car-free, vehicle-free, quiet place, or once the pollutants have been removed from the vehicles—or is it just that we do not want vehicles in those places at all? I guess I am asking: are we doing this to remove vehicles from the centres or are we doing this to remove pollutants?

Councillor Costigan: I think that we are all clear that there will always be a role for the car. It is an important way of people getting around. It also depends on where you live and if you are disabled, for example, there may be a need for a car. There will always be a need for the car. What we are looking at, though, is trying to reduce unnecessary use of the car where we can. If, for example, your kids would have much more fun walking to school and it was safe for them to do so—

Cherilyn Mackrory: If you are not miles away.

Councillor Costigan: Yes. If it was safe for them to do so, then we want to encourage people to do that and we want to put policies in place that help them to do that. It is similar with electric vehicles. We are trying to encourage people to move to electric vehicles where they can by rolling out electric vehicle charging points. I think that London councils have put in about 11,000 of them across London, so we have the greatest number of them in the country. In my own borough we have doubled the numbers in Ealing in just the space of a year. We are investing in helping people to transition to the cars of the future, and we know cars will continue as a very important way of getting around.

Q194 Cherilyn Mackrory: We appear to have lost Councillor Warren. Gentlemen, I do not know whether you want to add anything to what Councillor Costigan said.

Councillor Schwier: Yes, I have two points. I think that active travel going forward is very important and the design of that potentially achieved through planning but also for the health benefits that that gives. The importance of that is safety. You mentioned that you were three and a half miles away, but if you knew that you could hop on an e-bike in the morning and take your children to school you would do it. However, in order to do that you want to be safe.

Chair: Thank you. We are trying to get Councillor Warren back.



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Q195 Clive Lewis: Can I give you a multiple choice? This is in the real world rather than in the ideal world. When it comes to clean air charging zones, as local authorities are you, first, trying to change behaviour; secondly, raising revenue; or thirdly, a combination of both? You can answer completely honestly because we will not tell anyone.

Councillor Rodwell: I would say that first of all we are trying to change behaviour. It is a nudge, because if everyone did it we would not make any money anyway. The issue we have at the moment is that we have very bad air quality in lots of areas where there will be a charge, but once those vehicles are changed there is no longer a charge.

What is our ultimate goal? Our ultimate goal is to make people healthier. Three miles away, if you take that as a London borough—and I am a medium-sized London borough—you have already pretty much crossed my borough. We do not have that same issue that you would have in Essex or anywhere else like that. Our goal is certainly not to make money; our goal is to improve people's lives and give them choice.

We only have to go back to when I was a young lad. We didn't have a car. We did walk to the school. We did walk and get our shopping. It was that 15-minute circular living, and that is what I believe local authorities are trying to achieve again for people. As for reliance on the car, of course, there will always be cars, but should you have four or five cars per household? I would say probably not. I would say that our goal is not to make money; our goal is to improve lives.

Councillor Costigan: I think on school streets, yes, certainly, it is about changing lives, but on your specific question about revenue, any revenue that comes in via fines from people contravening the very clear signs there telling them not to go on to the school streets, that money is ringfenced. Legally, we cannot use it, even on social care as we would like to. We have to use that on transport, so we are not able to collect revenue for another reason. It has to go back into the transport system.

In my borough, any fines that we get from people who go through a school street at school drop-off time, we use that money to open new school streets and allow other schools to have the same opportunities to have clean air.

Councillor Schwier: I think that changing behaviour is an important aspect of it. There is a real change in behaviour now and understanding of what we are trying to achieve. That is an important message because you cannot force people to change, even through penalties. You are always going to get a percentage who are going to do exactly what they like. What we need to do is to help and enable people who want to change to make that change. That is when you will get some significant results.

Q196 Clive Lewis: The reason I asked was because I am aware from my own city council that the Institute for Government has noted that there has been a £15 billion cut in overall core funding from Government to local



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authorities. Hence you now have to make up more of your revenue from alternative sources, some of which is charging for various different things, including parking places and so on, fines included, although as you say it is compartmentalised, which is good to hear.

I guess the point I wanted to make, and you have picked up on it, is I wanted to ask whether you feel that you have the resources as local authorities to help people make the transition to cleaner, greener transportation and the public infrastructure in public transport, cycle ways and 15-minute cities—dare I use the term—so that people can do everything they need to do while on foot or on a bike. Do you have the resources to do that, given the cuts that we know have happened since 2010?

Councillor Rodwell: The simple answer to that is no. We needed more investment over the last decade, not just in the services we provide as local authorities but for the investment of what is a new green agenda, which is very important to the planning. We have had our services cut and we have not had that investment, so it has been a double whammy to local government. We are doing our best and it is fair, of course, that people say, “You are making a profit out of these fines”. No, you are not. They are ringfenced. They are there for road improvements, road safety and pavements. We have signs up saying, “This is what has been paid for” if we do it at a local level.

Frankly, no local authority has a surplus now in any way when it comes to this agenda. We are trying to put the money we can spare from what has not been spent in social adult and children into a very important agenda. It is quite interesting that of every school I have attended in my borough, and there are 62 of them, the top agenda item for those young people is the planet. That is very different to their grandparents, shall I say.

Councillor Costigan: From a London council’s perspective, I would echo the simple answer, which is no, we do not have sufficient resources. We also have particular idiosyncrasies, shall we say, of the London funding landscape in that we are funded slightly differently as local authorities in London than happens in the rest of the country. Our funding comes through TfL and then from there is passed on to us. This means that we miss out, first of all, on some big national budgets that we have no access to whatsoever. With the recent announcement of a pothole budget—I will just give that as an example—we were not able to access that. London was left out of that. That often happens because we are not part of that. There is a highways block of funding that comes to other councils that again London councils do not get. We are not included in that.

The issue with it coming through TfL is that TfL has to basically fight every year in the last few years for a funding deal from central government. That funding deal has been very tight. We know that Transport for London, unlike other big cities in the world, has to depend on fare income and has had to do that previously, rather than be funded from the public purse as happens in many other cities. As a result of that,



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of course, when Covid meant the bottom fell through the fares that they received, they were in a dire financial situation. The deal that they eventually managed to get from Government was not sufficient to properly then hand on moneys to local authorities in London so that we could do our bit on the active travel agenda.

We do what we can. This money comes through what is called LIP funding—I am getting technical—but that money has halved over the last few years. In my borough, as an example, Ealing, we got £2 million. That includes everything. It includes school streets, cycling, even junctions, all that kind of thing, to make our area better for walking and cycling. That amount of money can be spent in an instant. We have one cycle lane we want to put in and it costs £1 million for 1 km of cycle lane to go in. That road is 11 km long. On our current funding, even if we take half the funding we get every year, it will take us 11 years to do it. We do not by any means have sufficient funding for it. We do not have access to the national active travel budgets either, so it is a particular issue for London and it is a vagary of the GLA Act as well.

Q197 Clive Lewis: Councillor Schwier, you are a county council and I know that bus services can be quite dire sometimes, so I guess making the transition over, for people to make the transition over, can be quite costly and difficult. I guess the point I am making here, if you could pick up on this, is that ULEZ is getting a lot of bad publicity at the moment. It is something that is hurting people, the people who can least afford to pay for it. If people had access to better bus services and you were able to invest in public transport, cycle ways and alternative routes, would that make it an easier transition, do you think?

Councillor Schwier: I think it would make an easier transition. You are quite right about ULEZ in the fact that it affects those who can least afford it. I was going to say that I think the question is quite complex because this competitive bid funding is difficult. It uses a lot of our resources to apply for that, so we would like to see that funding longer term to make the investments in the cleaner, greener active travel that we want, not only for Essex but our residents and communities.

Of course, the other point about that is that we do not look at section 106 from planning as well to integrate that in, to be able to start achieving that. Often at the moment we are doing a section here and a section there but we need to start joining it all up. In order to get that cleaner, greener active travel across Essex, not only will it help with government funding but we need to put those resources in. As I say, this is the part where the private sector can help towards that.

I think that there is a multipronged approach to it. We need to be agile and look at the way to achieve our overall outcome for us in Essex, but it has to be a combination of long-term funding without too much demand on our resources. As has been mentioned, the resources at local government have been stretched financially due to reduced funding over the years. We are very keen to do as much as we can and we are putting



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plans and LCWIPs for our cycling infrastructure into place, but it is a question of joining it all up and getting it together.

As another instance, we are also potentially looking at and going out to local landowners for permissive paths to be able to join up local communities. Because of the restrictions from a highway, maybe the Government in the future could look at changing the status of public rights of way to help with the greener, cleaner active travel, including cycling and walking, using a combination of private resources, public footpaths and public rights of way that could be used long term to help join communities up and achieve much of what we have been talking about today.

Q198 **Chair:** I am very interested in that. It is something that I have been trying to encourage my local authority to do and to encourage DEFRA to include within the ELM scheme, some support to take those paths on the other side of the hedge from the roadway, which is too dangerous to cycle on.

Councillor Schwier: It would reduce air pollution as well, it would be a much better experience and it would encourage more active travel.

Chair: I digress. We have 20 minutes and three sets of questions so it is seven minutes each, starting with Duncan Baker.

Q199 **Duncan Baker:** I will be very quick then, Chair. We have spoken a lot about vehicle emissions. I have a couple of questions on industrial emissions and then on solid fuel burning. Large industrial installations are subject to different rules and the implementing of environmental permitting regimes. Are there a number of problems with those? Can you tell us what challenges councils face in trying to implement them? There is no specific person I am going to direct this to, so whoever wants to leap in.

Councillor Costigan: I come back to some of what I said earlier. A lot of the permitting issue is around the fees. We are not paid appropriately for the job that we do. That is probably the biggest issue that we face.

There is also the issue that Darren touched on earlier, which is that the Environment Agency also issues permits and has responsibilities in that regard. It has also had its funding significantly cut over the last few years and it does not necessarily have the resources to follow up to ensure that those permits are properly being applied. What happens then is that we get local residents coming to us as the council to say, "Look, there is this problem. You need to sort it out". We say, "It is not us that has issued this permit, it is the Environment Agency". It is the Environment Agency's job to police it, as it were, but we have real problems in then trying to get the Environment Agency to take on board that role. We understand why. We have massive sympathy because we face the same issues. It is because of a lack of resources on its side. It does mean from the residents' perspective they feel they are going from pillar to post and they are not getting the service they want from either of us at the end of the day.



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Q200 Duncan Baker: That lack of resource and capacity is something that is felt through local councils almost throughout the entire country without exception. You almost feel as though you are the last buck that has to do everything, exactly as we have spoken about. That comes on nicely to dealing with the enforcement on solid fuel burning. Again, local authorities have to regulate or have to carry out the enforcement mechanism. First of all, on wood-burning stoves we have had through a previous inquiry evidence to suggest that even when the most modern appliances are put in, they are still releasing 3 to 5 grams per hour. Are we doing a sufficient job? Should that limit be lower?

Councillor Schwier: Should it be lower? We would always want to strive to get it as low as possible, but when you are talking about solid fuel, and I presume you are talking about wood here, as we are all aware, wood needs to be dry to be burnt and too often it is not. I am aware of the recent legalities that have come in this May.

It is also a question of going back to the manufacturers to improve the design and everything else. Then again, how do you enforce that? That is the problem that we are going to have. How are we going to have the powers to enforce that because we lack the resources to be able to go in and find out perhaps individual properties that are not doing that. Again, I think that legal framework of having a limit to help air quality is extremely important.

On a local level, we need more enforcement power potentially to be able to look at that. Again, it is a question of being able to provide the data and monitor it as well.

Q201 Duncan Baker: With all the enforcements that a local council has to deal with—noise, for instance, must rank as one of the most difficult to deal with—it takes up time for enforcements. How much is smoke-free zones and how much is the burning of improper wood, effectively? Is it even ranked as important by many local councils in comparison to the other enforcement mechanisms that you have to police?

Councillor Rodwell: We are being asked to do many things. You said earlier about local government. We are the last line of enforcement, if you like, or the first line of enforcement, depending—

Duncan Baker: I would say you are the first line of enforcement, yes.

Councillor Rodwell: Well, I say this because surely the national Government have a role to play as well. What they put out we adhere to, we enforce on behalf of our national Government. That is what we are saying. This is what we have agreed as a nation and this is what we are going to do. We do that job. The problem is that we are being asked to do too much with too little. Of course, we have to rationalise whatever resources we have to what the demands are. I have to be honest, knowing what I know about my enforcement officers in my area, their big issue will be noise. Do we deal with things like people having fires in their back gardens? Yes, we do, as well as coal—



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Q202 **Duncan Baker:** I represent a rural constituency so noise and bonfires are probably the two biggest things that take up enforcement time. I have not heard of—I probably have one from memory—an enforcement officer having to deal with improper coal being burnt. It just does not seem to figure.

Councillor Rodwell: Agreed, but if you go back to the 1950s in this capital city, everyone was burning coal but we changed it. We had to because of the smog of 1952. What we are saying is that while we might not understand—the public certainly do not understand—what we are trying to achieve because it is an invisible killer, it is still important that we try to achieve it. I will agree with you: noise and fires in back gardens are probably the biggest two we have to deal with in London. The point is that these are all important because it is a silent killer. We know that by the trends in deaths.

Duncan Baker: We do not have the resources to do it yet, yes.

Councillor Costigan: Just to come in on it, it is important to us and it is increasingly important to residents. I have noticed more and more residents coming and they are quite educated on it. They know the whole detail of what PM_{2.5} is all about. They understand the WHO targets. They know a lot and they are demanding much more of local councils in terms of taking action on this.

The barriers that we face are, for example, in smoke-control areas we are not clear how we enforce that. There are rules there, but we are not clear about how we would go about enforcing it in practice. There needs to be a lot more guidance from Government on that so that we can take action.

There are also areas where residents are pushing us for action but we can't do anything at all. That is on domestic use of wood burners where Government have decided not to legislate against them. We are getting lots of local residents coming to us and saying, "Back us in our campaign" and we are getting campaigning calls from people.

The other area is, of course, gas boilers. It looks like Government are perhaps going to take a step back on the phasing out of those or there might be changes, so again we are unable to take action at the moment and we are not really clear what we might be able to do in the future and what steps we need to take.

One area that is specific to London—it may be the case in other areas, maybe Birmingham—is that we have a couple of canals that have houseboats on them. There are areas with quite high wood burning and solid fuel burning for their heating systems. We could do with some support from Government in terms of funding charge points to electrify the heating systems in houseboats in order to reduce that pollution in those very specific areas along the canals in London and the canals in Ealing.

Chair: I am going to have to move on because I know that Cat has to go to a meeting in a second and I want her to get in. The Government have



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legislated on wet wood, the point that was made earlier, so some action has been taken there.

Q203 Cat Smith: I have a couple of questions on indoor air quality in regards to public buildings and housing and planning. My first question is: what powers do you have as a local authority when it comes to planning applications for residential dwellings in areas of poor air quality? Would you have the powers and would you desire to have powers to have some kind of moratorium on residential housebuilding in areas with poor air quality?

Councillor Schwier: With regards to air quality, at the moment we have potentially four areas to improve air quality across Essex and they are mostly urban. I say mostly because it is not for them all. You make a very good point about air quality. How can we improve that in the future? One very good potential to improve air quality for internal buildings is to produce buildings that are net zero, in other words to highly insulate them so that the quality of the air in the building is beneficial to those residents using it. That is going to be over and above the new homes standard coming in in 2025. It is financially feasible, and considering we have just had the cost of living crisis and everything else, this is something that a lot of people are now looking at and wanting because of the cost of not only mortgages being more expensive but the cost of living being more expensive. The advantage of a net zero construction, almost a passive house home, means reduced living costs but better air quality and better health for that family. It also means that people go to school because they are then not so likely to have colds and to have better health. It has a whole full circle of increased benefits to that.

How do we achieve that? We can do it through planning but I don't think the regulation is there at the moment. There is an area there that could be adjusted and improved and I would say again guidance from central Government would help.

Q204 Cat Smith: Can I pull you more into the planning side of things? If there is a planning application in an area that has poor air quality, as a local authority do any of your local authorities have the power to say, "No, we cannot build residential here. The air quality is too poor"?

Councillor Rodwell: I don't believe we do. The issue is how we then square that. If you take, say, London here, when we have a housing crisis are we going to say, "The air quality is not good enough" on one end but, "By the way, you are homeless" on the other? It is going to be a very difficult thing to argue.

I think that what my colleague said is the right way to go. We need to make sure that the house build is of a quality that makes it passive and net zero. That is something that in planning terms we are trying to do. That is where we are trying to do as much as we can, but it is very hard because, again, if you were looking at this—and I will use my borough—we are planning to build housing because we need to but we have one of the worst air qualities in London. It is not from our situation, it is from



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having a major road that supplies London with its goods. It is a tricky situation that we would be penalising those living there on something that we have no control over.

Q205 Cat Smith: I think that is probably a fair point to highlight, that challenge between meeting a housing crisis but also in a crisis of air quality. In terms of the changes to the decent homes standard, given local authority tenants, do you feel they give those tenants sufficient power to be able to challenge the quality within their own home for things like mould and damp and making sure that they are adequately ventilated? Do tenants have enough power to challenge that?

Councillor Rodwell: I would say that local authorities are doing everything in their power on this situation, but if we take damp and mould as a situation, a lot of that is from the fact that they do not have enough money to heat their home. That is what we have found in a lot of the local authorities. I will go from my local authority again. Our biggest problem was that people would not have the windows open, rightly so because it was cold outside over the winter, but the condensation then became damp and mould. That is not an easy solution, unless we are going to give them money to heat the home to keep it at a certain temperature so that it does not happen in the first place. The truth of the matter is that we need the biggest retrofit programme in the country's history to fix that problem, and that is a much wider problem than what we can discuss here today.

Q206 Dr Matthew Offord: I think that it is a given that members of the public believe that air pollution is a problem facing the day-to-day lives of them and their families. I wanted to ask you for your respective organisations, and indeed of your own local authorities, what you are doing to educate the public on the real dangers.

Councillor Costigan: Across London, and I am speaking for London Councils today, we are all doing it in different ways but we are all producing various air quality strategies and plans in order to start off with having that overview of where we want to go and how we want to achieve it so that we can explain that to residents. A lot of us are including within those plans how we work in collaboration with residents so that we bring them on the journey with us.

To give an example of my own borough, which is Ealing, in our air quality strategy, which is about to be released, there is a whole section on that about working with local residents and, in particular, on indoor air quality, as mentioned earlier, because we think that is the area that people are probably less aware of and could also take steps themselves to try to remedy without us having to intervene. People do not necessarily realise that smoking indoors or even vaping indoors, cooking with the door closed and the windows closed, all those things are ways that they could perhaps address air quality in their homes.



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We are trying to educate people with that. All councils in London at least, and I'm sure beyond, are very aware that that is an approach we have to take so that people understand what action they can take locally.

Q207 Dr Matthew Offord: Let me press you on that. Having been a local councillor myself, I produced wonderful reports and strategies and policy documents. No one ever read them. The point is—

Clive Lewis: Outrageous.

Dr Matthew Offord: I have got over that. What I am trying to pin you down more on is you say you are working with residents. Can you give me some examples of what you are actually doing?

Councillor Costigan: Sure. Even in putting together our strategy on what we want to do, we first of all consulted on it. We got lots of responses from residents and from campaign groups locally on what they wanted to see in there and what action we needed to take. We then put together a next iteration of what that strategy would look like, which included comments from many of those local groups and national groups as well, like Mums for Lungs, for example. They came in with other ideas to try to hold us to account and make sure we were doing the maximum we possibly could to deliver for local residents.

We do work very closely with residents and, as I say, I have noticed, increasingly so, people are getting involved in the discussion and are very keen to see the council working and work in collaboration with local people. We have car-free day, for example, in September and we have a lot of local interest from residents' groups in running play streets on car-free day. You close off your local street. We are doing it a bit along the lines of the Coronation and the street parties for that. People can close off the streets and it can just be a wonderful place of play for children. That is an air quality initiative and we have found that those are the things that local residents are interested in and keen to be involved in. It also builds up that sense of community in an area.

Q208 Dr Matthew Offord: Councillor Rodwell, do you have anything to add from your area or, indeed, the LGA?

Councillor Rodwell: Yes. From what I know of the local government family, we all do similar things. I was sitting here thinking, yes, we have done this stuff, the streets, the school streets. It all starts a conversation. I did say earlier about the 62 schools. I have met with all the school councils and they are more ferocious than I ever see in Westminster, I can assure you. They are very keen about the green agenda, more than I ever realised. It has invoked peer power. When you ask what we have done, yes, we have done a bit. As local authorities, you are right, most of the reports never get read, but it is not about reports being read. It is about the conversation that is on the ground. In our schools the conversation is on this subject matter.

What I can say to you is that we will not be forgiven by these future generations if we do not do what we are being tasked to do now. They



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understand the consequences and responsibilities of it. I am proud that in my own area I have litter clubs. These are children going out and collecting litter. We do it, of course, as a statutory service, but they have pride in their community. This is all interlinked. How do we keep building on this emphasis that we are all on the one planet? How do we do that and make sure that we all have a future together in a way that is green and sustainable while making sure that business flourishes as well? It is a tricky one but I do believe that the community is certainly leading this and our job is to help to facilitate that ambition.

Q209 Dr Matthew Offord: Councillor Schwier, where would you say you do things differently in the rural local authority of Essex?

Councillor Schwier: In Essex, we have an open consultation every year with all our residents. We know that correspondingly in the last four years the environment, air quality and everything to do with the environment and climate is incredibly important to them. It rates in the top four constantly. It has gone down a touch this last year from the previous years, but not significantly. We know what the general public think and want. We do produce a report annually, a carbon report, "You Said, We Did", and it does get quite well read, which is good.

Dr Matthew Offord: I did not say yours wasn't, I said mine weren't.

Councillor Schwier: I agree with the comment. It is about the consultation and making that awareness as well. I think that is terribly important. Air quality is important to us every day, every breath we take, so I can only concur with all the comments from this afternoon.

Q210 Dr Matthew Offord: Playing devil's advocate, as my colleague has as well, some people may say this is not only an important issue but you are speaking to very small audiences, so do we not need a national approach to air pollution, something that the Government should do? What would be your response to that?

Councillor Schwier: I think that it would be a good idea if the Government were to undertake that. The one important thing is that everyone is going to have a different idea of air pollution and what it is. To be able to tell the story of air pollution and help people understand what the Government are trying to achieve, either at the national level or even at local authority level, would be significant progress and would help enormously.

Councillor Rodwell: Again, I concur with that. We have come here saying that we want Government to give us the framework that we can operate within that allows us to do the job that we are tasked to do, which is to make sure that we have good air quality, no matter where we reside, in a city or in rural England.

Councillor Costigan: I agree. It is the thread that has gone through the conversation, isn't it? We do want that national framework that we can then deliver on the ground.



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I just wanted to go back quickly to another thing that gets local people involved that I should have mentioned, which is anti-idling work. We find local people are up for getting involved in that. Recently, we had a group of local people stand near a level crossing, speaking to people there about idling. It is something that people are very aware of.

We have just increased the fines in my borough in Ealing to the maximum that you can increase them to, which is £80. I know that Camden and a couple of other boroughs have done similar. That is the maximum you can do under current legislation, and even with that it is not a massive deterrent and it is also difficult to enforce against. We have to go to people, ask them to switch off their engine, go away, come back again. It is really only the worst offenders who will just refuse to do what they are told.

It is very hard for us to enforce against idling and it is an area that residents want to see action. If we had national changes to idling legislation that made that easier to enforce, I think that would be a great thing for local residents.

Q211 Dr Matthew Offord: That is very helpful. Thank you. Very quickly and finally, the Government have said that they will introduce their own communications campaign but it will focus on domestic combustion and air quality. Do you think that they are the right areas for the Government to be focusing upon or should it be expanded?

Councillor Schwier: I think it should be expanded. Comms will be very important. Domestic is a good idea but I think air pollution is a bigger subject than that. As central Government, you have the opportunity to be able to help get that message across, and it should be all-encompassing as well. By doing that, better comms about it will help that behaviour change and that is what we are all trying to achieve in air quality at whatever level of local government.

Councillor Costigan: We mentioned at the start that for London in particular it is road traffic that is the big contributor to the dirty air that we are breathing. If we are to ignore that in any communications campaign, we are losing the battle before we have even started. We have to be up front with people about that so that they understand that the damage that is being done to people's lungs, and all our organs in fact, from this level of pollution is something that we need to address and think about. We need to be honest with people about it. I think that needs to be included and the broader range of impacts on air pollution.

Councillor Rodwell: If you take the fact that what we are talking about kills roughly 30,000-plus people a year, I go back to "clunk click". We should be looking at it in that way. That is a lot of people dying prematurely through something that we can do something about. I think that it is the responsibility of us all to do that. While it is good that they are saying it in these areas, I do agree with colleagues that it should be much wider. It should be looking at nudge change. We are not trying to do this to make money. We are doing this to save lives and give people



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better life outcomes as well while they want to be around. Whether it is in the rural countryside or whether it is in cities, we should have the right to have good, clean air.

Chair: Thank you very much. That brings us to an end for our panel today. I would like to thank our witnesses, Councillor Deirdre Costigan, Councillor Darren Rodwell, Councillor Peter Schwier and, in her absence, Councillor Sarah Warren. I think that her team are in the gallery so perhaps they could pass on to her our thanks for contributing and our regrets that technology has let us down. Thank you very much.