HOUSE OF COMMONS

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Air Quality, HC 468

Tuesday 29 September 2020

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Ian Byrne; Geraint Davies; Dave Doogan; Rosie Duffield; Barry Gardiner; Dr Neil Hudson; Robbie Moore; Mrs Sheryll Murray.

Questions 43 - 96

Witnesses

I: Jemima Hartshorn, Founder, Mums For Lungs; Kate Langford, Programme Director, Guy's and St Thomas' Charity; Professor Dame Parveen Kumar, Professor, British Medical Association.

II: Paul Swinney, Director of Policy, Centre for Cities; Subrah Krishnan-Harihara, Head of Research, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– Mums for Lungs

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Jemima Hartshorn, Kate Langford and Professor Dame Parveen Kumar.

Q43 **Chair:** Welcome to EFRA's inquiry into air quality. Welcome to both witnesses and members. Our first panel is Jemima Hartshorn, founder of Mums For Lungs; Professor Dame Parveen Kumar, chair of the board of science at the British Medical Association; and Kate Langford, programme director for the health effects of air pollution programme at Guy's and St Thomas' Charity. Would you like to introduce yourselves for the record?

Jemima Hartshorn: Hello. I am Jemima Hartshorn. I am the mum of two children, one and four years old, and I am the founder of the parents' network Mums For Lungs, which campaigns against air pollution.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: My name is Professor Dame Parveen Kumar. I am professor of medicine and education at Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry at Queen Mary University of London. I am here representing the BMA, as I chair the board of science and was also past president. Also, I am an ambassador for the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, a group of which the BMA was a founding member. For the Committee's reference, UKHACC, as we call it, is a coalition of major health institutions committed to increasing awareness of the public health impact of climate change and encouraging the health sector to act in a more sustainable, environmentally friendly and conscious way.

Kate Langford: Good afternoon. I am Kate Langford. I am programme director for a programme on the health effects of air pollution at Guy's and St Thomas' Charity. We are an urban health foundation, focused on reducing health inequalities in south London.

Q44 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I will start off with the first question, which is to Parveen. In its evidence the BMA said that before the pandemic the UK Government was not going far enough to address air pollution. As a straight question to you, where should it have been going further? The floor is yours. What should the Government have been doing?

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: Thank you for having us here. We just feel they are really not going quickly enough. It was declared a public health emergency by the clean air strategy last year and we seem to be moving very slowly forwards. The problem with the pollution is that we are at double the level that the WHO suggested we have on PM 2.5, which as you know is one of the substances that injure the lungs. We are just not forward enough with it.

The sort of things we would like you to think about are, first, the level of pollution and what we should be aiming at. With the Covid crisis and the lockdown, we have seen a fall in the level of pollution in the air, which has been quite amazing. We would like that to continue. Clearly we need

implementation of better transport, less diesel and petrol, and more electric and eco-friendly modes of travel. We are very keen on active travel, in terms of cycling and walking. We need better data modelling and reporting of what is going on, to give us tips on where we should be going. There are several things in that way.

As doctors, we find it absolutely distressing to see a patient who is gasping for breath and just cannot get it. From the doctor's point of view it is frustrating, as clean air would have solved part of that problem. Really, we are very keen on promoting healthy air from now on.

Q45 **Chair:** It is a combination of many things in order to get us to a much better place. We are at double the CF 2.5, so we have a lot more to do. I asked a question in Business Questions today, when we were saying that business has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 30%, but transport by only 3%. There is no doubt that we cannot just target transport, but we can use fewer cars, more electric cars and hydrogen lorries, to try to reduce the particulates especially. As far as the BMA is concerned, naturally, you are interested in all aspects of improving air quality.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: Yes. The NHS occupies 5% of the pollution we see in the environment. To get more environmentally friendly and change the fleet of transport that we have, we need to have some resources and funding.

Q46 **Chair:** It will be a case of having the right resources and putting them in the right place. Even getting people to hospital and all these things, in their ways, will create a certain amount of pollution. You are saying we have to deal with everything in the round.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: Yes. The other thing we tend to forget, with the traffic, the cars and so on, is the effect that tyres and braking have on pollution as well. Not only do we want to change it into more electric, economically friendly cars and trucks, but we also want fewer journeys. One of the tragic things about this Covid epidemic is that it has pointed out various things, which were obvious to us all, but we have not pursued. One hopes we will learn from it.

Q47 **Chair:** We are sometimes inclined to think that electric vehicles will be entirely pollution free, but particulates are still coming off the brakes, the tyres and other parts of the car. We need to be conscious of that, but we also need to be able to travel around, so we have to get the balance right. I know various car manufacturers are making better brakes now, with fewer particulates coming from them. We are working in the right direction, but your clear message to Government and industry is that we need to move a lot more quickly. Would I be putting words in your mouth?

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: No, thank you for saying that. We would absolutely cement that. Perhaps we ought to look at innovations as well. A couple of my students have developed a drone to take the

pathology samples of one hospital to another. I have referred them up to the innovation centre of the NHS and it is now piloting them. You will not have all that traffic on the road taking samples and we can do it another way. A little bit of innovation here would be a good idea as well.

Kate Langford: I just wanted to build on Parveen's point about the NHS and the contribution it makes to emissions. This is really important. With our local hospital partners, we have been looking at how, as anchor institutions, they can improve population health by tackling their own emissions and reducing their own contributions to local air pollution. They have been doing some really important work on this. Last year, they launched a freight consolidation hub, which is going to cut the number of truck deliveries into central London by 90% through taking off 36,000 truck deliveries every year.

There is good practice that we can look to from NHS trusts, but they need more resource. Especially at this time, with everything NHS trusts have just been through, they need resource, and dedicated resource, to be able to implement these types of strategies, because they do not happen without people, time and effort.

Chair: That is a good point. Thank you very much for that.

Q48 **Dave Doogan:** Parveen and Jemima, both of your organisations have stated that the Government's 2019 clean air strategy is not actually good enough. Building on your previous answers, why do you believe this to be the case? If you could make one change to it, what would it be and how would it improve the situation?

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: It is a big, big ask, to give only one single thing. There are so many things that combine to make it. One of the problems with the clean air strategy is to do with how the aim is going to be achieved. There does not seem to be follow-up on that, at least not that we have seen in the Environment Bill. Most of this is going to have to be done on the ground by local health authorities. The Government have devolved it to local health authorities, but they may not have the resources, the funding or, indeed, the expertise. Clearly, they would need that to be able to pursue anything further.

They also need some sort of tool or strategy, so that what they say can be delivered, for the benefit of the public. I cannot give you one single thing, Dave; I am sorry, but that would be one. I keep going back to the targets. We are way below the target we should really be at and not only that, but we do not have much time. This should be achieved by 2030. It would be lovely to bring it forward, but we are really on a precipice. Communication is great. It is all very well seeing all the traffic in London being stopped by the cycle pathways. We all applaud that, but if the public do not understand why we are doing it they will complain. Somewhere it has to be the responsibility of all of us to try to reduce the pollution. That is a very good question, Dave. Thank you, but I cannot give you one single answer.

Jemima Hartshorn: I find it very difficult boiling this down to one response and I am much less of an expert than Parveen or Kate, coming from a proper grassroots campaigning background and having started Mums For Lungs because we saw the need. I agree that there is a real problem about communication. A lot of people are not aware how bad air pollution is, how much it affects their children, how much air pollution there can be trapped inside a car, that you might be exposing your children to more pollution by driving. All of this really requires a huge, massive public health campaign and it basically needs to start tomorrow. It needs to be really clear to everyone.

Mums For Lungs has done a small campaign like that. We had over 2,000 posters put up about a week ago for car-free day. That is nothing; that is on the tiny budget of a tiny grassroots group. This needs to be a huge, big effort on all channels, so everyone understands that this is a public health crisis. For everyone's health, but especially for the children and those with long-term conditions, this must change. That would be one aspect that I am strongly aware needs to happen and I am frustrated by the lack of seeing this happening.

One straightforward thing, in my view, would be the transport sector, so expanding the ULEZ in London as soon as possible, implementing clean air zones across the country and combining that with good, smart measures like diesel scrappage schemes, so those people with the oldest cars, the most reliant on their cars and perhaps the most deprived do not feel that the odds are stacked against them again. A lot could happen.

We often get really confused in this discussion about the cars, because currently we see that roads are incredibly congested. They always have been, across London. At the same time, the people who are the most affluent drive about five times as much as the people in the least affluent parts of society. I understand that, if you are less affluent, you are much more reliant on the bus; then you are very slow on the bus, because the roads are so congested in London. Communication and something around the transport sector in a smart way are the things I would advocate the quickest.

Q49 **Dave Doogan:** The two things that jumped out at me from your answer, Jemima, were the social justice element and the fairness of the transition that we have to collectively make, as well as the scrappage element, which has great potential to make big differences, but does not seem to be getting raised. From both of those answers, I would offer a very quick sum-up to both witnesses and offer you the chance to say whether you feel that the definition of "emergency" has been lost in all this. We call it a public health emergency, but we do not behave as though it is an emergency. Would you say that is a fair assessment?

Jemima Hartshorn: Yes, I agree with that. We have just seen how Government, at all levels, react to what we perceive as, and what clearly is, a respiratory public health emergency, with Covid-19 right now. But air pollution has been a silent killer across the UK for many, many years.

Many people every year prematurely die—around 40,000, I understand—and we need to treat it as such, as it is. Just because air pollution is slower, will affect people in different, more long-term ways and it is not as clear-cut why people die or why their health is so bad, the problem has not been receiving the response it needs.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: My answer to you is "absolutely". Emergency requires action and I just do not see that.

Q50 **Geraint Davies:** The Environment Bill is our opportunity to change clean air. I know some of you have been critical of the Environment Bill. I was wondering whether you could run through, very briefly, your key criticisms of the Environment Bill and add how you would change the Environment Bill to make things better in terms of air quality. I am thinking of legally binding air quality limits, to start with. I do not know whether Parveen has any particular suggestions—for example 10 micrograms per cubic metre of PM 2.5 by 2030 and maybe a staging position of 12 in 2025. Is there a need for legal enforcement of that? Finally, should anything be done about indoor air quality combining with outdoor? Can I ask Parveen first, perhaps, to say what she thinks is wrong with the Bill and how it could be put right?

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: We are not saying that the Bill is wrong; we are just saying that it should be much more ambitious. As I said earlier, the current level of PM 2.5 is double that set by the WHO. Yes, it might be worth while doing a staging procedure, but at least let us get some action in going towards the 2030 WHO deadline. That is only nine to 10 years away, so we do not have much time.

The BMA did a recent survey of our members and found that 83 of the members are really worried about the impact of air pollution. This affects the wellbeing of all the patients we see and, as Jemima says, has had impacts on other chronic diseases, which come along with the disadvantaged people and living in highly polluted areas. We are very keen that this is tackled.

We are slightly concerned that the Bill devolves the role to the Secretary of State and he has the ability to revoke any air quality targets that might be created from the Bill. This is fine, but it could derail the UK Government's stated ambition to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. We certainly hope that would be addressed.

Thirdly, we are rather concerned that the Bill does not give the Office for Environmental Protection adequate independence to scrutinise the Government's performance on the environment in a more robust and impartial way. As you know, we have been consistently in breach of the EU directives on air quality, for which I know we have paid significant fines. It is vital we have an independent body that can scrutinise what the Government are doing and perhaps have a closer relationship with Parliament.

Q51 **Geraint Davies:** Yes, and the power to enforce legally binding limits, I guess.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: That would be excellent, if we can get that.

Q52 **Geraint Davies:** Can I turn to the other witnesses? What more could be done in the Environment Bill to make things better?

Jemima Hartshorn: I do not have a lot to add, after an expert like Parveen speaking, but I am really frustrated to see that it says October 2022 would be the time at which the PM 2.5 levels have to be decided. There has already been so much evidence and research. The WHO is currently thinking about making the limits stricter, so clearly there is evidence that even the current levels are not good enough, and still the current draft of the Environment Bill says not just that we have to reach the WHO limits but that we have another two years to decide what levels we are going to aim for.

Q53 **Geraint Davies:** The current Bill, of course, is the property of DEFRA. I am wondering whether all Departments, Transport in particular, but local authorities etc, should have targets built in on improving air quality both indoors and outside, and near schools in particular. Do you have any thoughts, Kate?

Kate Langford: I definitely echo what Parveen and Jemima were saying about aligning the legal limits with the WHO's recommendation on particulate matter. This needs to be a cross-government effort, when you think about the role that transport has to play, but, as we discussed earlier, NHS organisations also have a role to play in reducing their own emissions, as well as the Department for Transport, the Department of Health and Social Care and BEIS. We hear from local businesses that they are trying to make a transition to more sustainable ways of working, full stop, especially around the climate crisis. They find it confusing that they get slightly different messages on climate and air pollution. Businesses want better joined-up advice on how they can both tackle the climate crisis and reduce local pollution. I would love to see a more joined-up effort from across Government on this Bill.

Q54 **Geraint Davies:** Parveen, finally, if there were enforceable fines, is there a case for paying those fines towards the NHS or maybe to pollution-reducing schemes in local authorities? The cost of air pollution is something like £20 billion per year, the last I heard, apart from the 40,000 deaths we heard about.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: That is a good point. Initially, we would not like any fines, because we would like to have them succeed, but if there are fines they should be paid back to the suggestions you have made, entirely. That is an excellent idea. I do not know how the Government work in this way, but you would have a better idea of that.

Chair: Having done a previous inquiry into air quality, there is no doubt

that getting Government to work across Departments, making it all a priority, is what we need, as well as working better with local authorities and everything. It goes across society generally, to the points you have all been making. Thank you for making them, and I suspect that that might find its way into this report as well. I am always told off for second guessing what might be in the report.

Q55 **Ian Byrne:** I direct the first question to Kate, please. In your evidence, Kate, you said that health inequalities are associated with air pollution and worse outcomes from Covid-19. This was backed up by our last evidence session, when Professor Marmot said, "Covid-19 has exposed the underlying inequalities in society and amplified them". How important is tackling poor air quality in addressing these wider inequalities?

Kate Langford: As a health foundation, we think it is a key part of tackling the wider health inequalities that we see. On the interrelationship between inequalities and air pollution, we see three key relationships. First, those most exposed to air pollution are the ones who are contributing least to it, at least in our boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark, where we work. That echoes what Jemima said earlier.

Secondly, those most exposed are more likely to be affected by other determinants of ill health. We have seen that the areas and neighbourhoods of our boroughs that have high levels of pollution are also those with high levels of unemployment and of childhood obesity. We do not think it is a simple causal relationship; we think that the layering of all these different determinants of health is impacting on people's health.

The last point, which I think is really key, is that some of these communities that we think about—people who live around the Old Kent Road or in Walworth—are at the moment the least likely to be involved in decisions about air pollution and to raise their voices about air pollution. We have seen that with the local consultations that have been going on about the changes to London streetscapes to encourage active travel, which we fully support. When you look at who is actually wanting changes on their roads, it tends to come from the less polluted parts of our borough.

We think this is really important, listening to the communities that are most affected by air pollution and getting them to drive more decisions. That is also part of the problem we see at the moment with communities not fully accepting some of the changes that are happening. Yes, we think it is an essential part of tackling health inequalities. That is what we are focused on for the next nine years of our programme.

Q56 **Ian Byrne:** Jemima, can I bring you in on this? Your outstanding campaigning is highlighting what Kate said and addressing the need to let people know how important air pollution is. That is a really valid point; certainly in Liverpool I do not think people actually understand the damage air pollution is doing to our communities and the people who are

getting damaged by it. What you are doing is extremely important and hopefully you can roll that out across the country. Please, answer the question, Jemima.

Jemima Hartshorn: Thank you. I do not have anything to add to Kate, but I feel, as you said, that awareness is just generally too low of how high air pollution is, what it does to our children, what it does to all of us and what we can do about it. Currently, in the UK, I read that something like 200,000 wood-burning stoves are sold every year. They are installed in houses that have central heating. They provide comfort and a lovely beautiful fire, but they are so incredibly polluting as well. If people knew what a wood-burning fire in their own homes and all the smoke going into their neighbours' homes would do to them, they would not install them. I find it very difficult to be positive about the DEFRA eco-stoves classification. All wood-burning stoves that are not for people's main heating should be banned.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: I could not agree more with what Kate and Jemima said. It is lovely to hear from Jemima how a couple of mums can set up what she has set up. It is highly impressive and inspiring, to me certainly. I entirely agree with Kate that air pollution is a known driver of ill health. When you see the figures, you really think how awful this is. In London, 46% of the disadvantaged community experience levels of NOx pollution that exceeds the EU limit. This falls to 2% in wealthier communities. The disadvantaged people live in the most polluted areas and have more disease. The combination of this as a disease burden is really quite extraordinary.

Q57 **Ian Byrne:** Can I drill into that a little from a BMA perspective? How do we get the message out so that people have an understanding? You are right. From a Liverpool perspective, we tried to put cycle lanes in my constituency and it caused lots of disquiet. There was congestion undoubtedly from the cycle lane, but we did not seem to take the people on the journey, explaining why this was necessary for the change of culture. I am very interested in, from the three witnesses, how we amplify and bring people with us on this journey.

Kate Langford: I was having a conversation on Friday, with some community researchers we work closely with, about this very issue. There is a bit of a myth that BME communities do not care about air pollution. A big part of the problem is that a lot of the people around Walworth and Old Kent Road have been living in those environments for years or decades. They feel neglected and that no one really cares about the environment that they are living in. There is something really important about, first, trying to listen and showing what can be done for those people living in those inner-city environments.

Sometimes we need to think about what changes the general population need to make and then what changes you need people to make who are most affected. Active travel is really important, but I also do not think we should be lecturing people who live in inner-city communities who already

have the lowest levels of car ownership in the country about cycling more. That is not the problem. The problem is people coming in from outside and driving through their areas. The problem is freight coming through their areas. It is really important that we listen to these communities, offer them practical solutions and do not exacerbate the problem by putting pressure on them to solve problems that they did not create in the first place.

Ian Byrne: That is an excellent answer.

Chair: That is a good point.

Q58 **Ian Byrne:** I will put this question to Jemima first. To what extent should our priority be tackling air quality in the most deprived communities, which are suffering from this inequality, seeing it most and living it, versus reducing pollution levels across the country as a whole? Should we focus more on the deprived areas?

Chair: That has given you all something to think about.

Jemima Hartshorn: I do not think I am the best person to respond to that, because often these things are not really clear cut. Where people live might be different to where they go to school, which might be different to where they travel to. I am not the medical person here who would know how all these things interact the most strongly, or whether living on a main road but then going to school on a much less polluted road would overall be a healthier approach.

For me, the point is that air pollution needs to be reduced across the country, everywhere. Parveen made a very strong point that so much of the country lives in air pollution levels higher than WHO limits and that I find unacceptable. On your direct question, you need to ask someone who is better qualified to assess that.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: I do not know whether I should accept that, Jemima. One thing that is true of leadership in general is that you must take the people with you. The sad part is that we are sending things down and, if the communities do not understand why we are doing them, they are not going to take them up. A good ship runs by taking the people with it, so that each is helping the other. It is lovely to be in a group discussion where everybody is on the same side, with the metric that we want to get through. The first answer is the communication that Jemima mentioned, which is very important.

Should we focus on deprived communities? Yes, I think we should, because we would probably see the greatest changes there. But remember, as Michael Marmot pointed out in the last session, that this is happening to everybody everywhere. We are all getting the effects of pollution on our lungs, but because it is spread out we have not concentrated on it. It has to be taken all the way across, but perhaps we should start off with the focus on the most deprived.

Kate Langford: I would definitely support starting with the most deprived communities, partly because, if we solve this problem for those most deprived communities, it will have a positive impact on a much wider population. It is just that I think the problem is most entrenched in some of those communities. Some of the trade-offs with economic considerations feel more heightened in those communities. If we start with solving the problem there, we will be able to tackle the problem overall. There is a moral imperative for us to start with people we know are already affected by cumulative health inequalities.

Chair: From our previous inquiry, I know that one argument is to get a diesel scrappage scheme targeted towards deprived areas in particular, so that people with lower incomes get the benefit from actually being able to change a car. Otherwise you land up with everybody who can afford to change their car using a scrappage scheme and it does not necessarily help in the worst-hit and most deprived areas. We will take this evidence. I also take Parveen's point that we have to reduce general levels of pollution as well, because they all add up in the end. Thank you for those answers.

Q59 **Mrs Murray:** I would like to look at what the risks and opportunities are for air quality going forward. I will address the first part of my question to Kate and Jemima, and, so you do not feel left out Parveen, I have a question just for you. Kate and Jemima, your organisations stress the importance of public transport to prevent the return of pre-pandemic levels of NO2 from car journeys. What do you recommend the Government, local government and transport bodies do to achieve this?

Jemima Hartshorn: In a way, if the bus capacity is down, it would make sense to run more buses. The other thing is to encourage everyone who can to work from home, and to enable everyone who can to cycle or walk to work. Someone like me should never be on a bus. I can cycle and leave a space on the bus for someone who cannot get on a bike easily.

Q60 **Mrs Murray:** Can I drill down on that a little? Very clearly, that would work for towns and cities, but what about rural areas where public transport is perhaps very sparse?

Jemima Hartshorn: My father lives in a very rural community and the bus runs, apparently, on Saturdays and Thursdays. I am not sure if that is a joke or not. Obviously, the bus needs to run more often and at times that actually work for people who need the bus. That is one thing, but the other thing I find very difficult about rural communities or roads in those areas is that there is often no pavement, even, let alone a cycle lane. I would feel very hesitant as a parent to let a 12-year-old child cycle by themselves to school, whereas in Germany any kid of 10 is cycling to school by themselves. It needs a lined-up approach, as do many of these aspects.

For me as a campaigner, it is quite obvious that the £27 billion that I understand was promised to roads and car infrastructure needs to be

reallocated to a much stronger extent than the currently promised £3.5 billion for walking and cycling, to enable everyone who possibly can to walk and cycle safely, to stay out of the cars and to leave the cars to those people who need to drive.

Q61 **Mrs Murray:** Would car sharing perhaps be a way, as an initial move?

Jemima Hartshorn: I hope so, but I do not know how the particularities of car sharing and Covid would work. That might be a problem.

Chair: That one is probably for post-Covid, Sheryll.

Q62 **Mrs Murray:** That is what I was talking about, Chairman. Kate, could I have your answer to the same question, please?

Kate Langford: I do not have much to add to Jemima's answer; it was really clear. I would only say that it is not just a matter for local authorities. We need to have continued public transport investment to ensure that we have the same levels of infrastructure when we come out of this pandemic as when we went into it, if not better. That is really important. As much as we back the messages around active travel, cycling and walking, we know that it is not an option for everyone and that the communities that are most affected by air pollution are the most reliant on public transport. That might be beyond a lot of local authorities and needs central Government as well.

Q63 **Mrs Murray:** Could I lastly ask for your views? Government initially introduced some community vehicles—these small, 16-seater buses that voluntary groups use. Very clearly, the number they can carry is very restricted at the moment, but do you think that sort of thing is helpful?

Kate Langford: I am not sure I can particularly answer that question, because my focus is on Lambeth and Southwark, so I am thinking much more about urban transport infrastructure, unfortunately.

Q64 **Mrs Murray:** Parveen, the BMA has called for more funding for active travel in response to Covid-19. How much do you estimate would be needed?

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: This is a question I do not think I can answer, but we can come back to you. I always think about how we are getting everybody to actively cycle, but what we want to do is get the pollution down. I can just imagine everybody cycling in the polluted atmosphere, which is really not going to help the matter at all. It is a double-edged sword. I really do not know the figure. I would have to look that up.

Q65 **Mrs Murray:** Is that something you can make inquiries about and, if you have any information, write to the Committee?

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: Certainly, we will do that. Thank you for asking.

Mrs Murray: Thank you very much.

Chair: Parveen, if you could, give us that in writing, please. It is quite a complex question but very useful as written evidence. Thank you very much.

Q66 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you very much to our three witnesses for being before us today. This is a really great session. My question is directed primarily at Kate. You have intimated in some of your earlier answers and in your submission that we need to have a bit of joined-up thinking and partnership working to achieve our goals of reducing air pollution. I specifically want to focus this question on the help that businesses may need, if we want businesses to reduce their contribution to air pollution. You have intimated that there could be scope for public sector co-investment. Some businesses might feel, "We would like to do it, but we are not going to be able to do it". How would you envisage this partnership and co-investment working? Are there any examples you could give the Committee?

Kate Langford: One thing that has really struck us, during the coronavirus pandemic, is that pre-pandemic we had lots of conversations with local businesses, through business improvement districts, about what they wanted to do to tackle air pollution locally. It was really, really high up their agenda. Since the pandemic, for obvious reasons, it has really slipped down their agenda. They do not feel able to make investments in things like cargo bikes, to spend the time having joined-up conversations about, say, freight consolidation or changing the times of deliveries. A lot of the smaller to medium businesses, especially, that are part of those business improvement districts feel they do not have the headspace to be thinking about these issues at this point in time.

We would love to see a combination of carrot and stick policies to incentivise businesses to make these types of changes. I do not have all the answers as to what those look like, but the things we would really like to see include carbon audit processes. As I said earlier, lots of businesses are undergoing those, so how can we adapt them to also look at contribution to local air pollution? We have talked to some local businesses about loan schemes, so that they can make the transition to greener options, like cargo bikes or electric vans. It is always going to have to be a balance of some stick, in terms of reporting, and carrot, in terms of financial help for them to make that transition.

To give a plug, Global Action Plan has a report out called "Build Back Cleaner Air". In there are more recommendations for businesses and what they can do to transition to cleaner air, as well.

Q67 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you. That is really helpful. You are talking about carrot and stick, and a theme is emerging. If you want to get people to improve, whether it is the general public, individual businesses or larger businesses, you need some incentive potentially. Do you see a role there for central Government and local government working closely together to facilitate that? Is that something you would be positive about?

Kate Langford: Yes. It would be helpful if central Government could set some standards. As a really basic thing, we have been looking at how we help local businesses to calculate what their contribution to local air pollution might be, through everything from the transport they use to things like diesel generators and construction businesses, which we know are a major source of air pollution in Lambeth and Southwark. Lots of businesses do not have the methodologies to do that. Some of that can be set centrally.

Dr Hudson: Thank you very much. That is really helpful.

Q68 **Rosie Duffield:** This is really for Jemima and Kate. Thank you both for being here. You stressed the need for local community action and you both obviously have a lot of experience in that. I have to declare an interest: I have been active on this in my area for about five years now. To what extent are local councils receptive to taking action on air quality in your experience, even if it means dealing with opposition groups?

Jemima Hartshorn: In my experience, it varies strongly. The reasons why a local authority would or would not get involved strongly and progressively with clean air measures depends on a lot of things. It can depend on political leadership, on resources, on what their focuses are and on how strong a group they have locally campaigning on air pollution. It is a mixture of things.

That is why I would urge or request that national Government take a central role in showing real political leadership and showing that this must be an absolute priority, that cleaning up the air is what is done across the country and that the funds, powers and resources are going to be made available to local authorities, which often feel under-staffed and under-resourced, and wonder how they are going to provide a school street when the costs are about £13,000 in cameras. That feels so disproportionate: £13,000 should not be a problem if, in return, you are providing clean air and a safe environment for children at the beginning and end of their school day.

Kate Langford: I would echo what Jemima just said. Locally, we have some really committed local authorities. Both Lambeth and Southwark are really committed to air pollution. There is more that central Government could do to push them. Coming back to the legal limits, we see a lot more action on NO2 than on particulate matter, despite the fact that we see levels of particulate matter across the whole of our boroughs that are above the WHO guidelines. That is about the incentives and the target we are setting for what good looks like for local authorities.

The other thing I have seen local authorities really struggle with, especially in London, is dependency on other bodies, such as TFL. There is a reason why local authorities are focusing a lot on what they can do in local neighbourhoods at the moment. That is because they do not have the control over big main roads, which sit with TFL at the moment. We need more joined-up working between local authorities, TFL and DfT.

Q69 **Rosie Duffield:** I know, in my area, the council's monitoring equipment for PM levels has been woefully inadequate and broken for the last several years. They have not replaced that and they are saying they have no money. I am assuming your experience of local authorities is that they have less money now because of the pandemic, or they are going to allocate less money to this as a priority.

Jemima Hartshorn: We see councils taking very different approaches to this. Lambeth Council, for example, has committed to spending a lot of the funds that it already had on measures around road transport and enabling cycling.

Kate Langford: I just wanted to stress one thing. I agree with you, Rosie, that we see that the local authorities just do not have enough resource to do as much as they would like to do. They will have even less resource coming out of this pandemic.

The other thing that strikes me is that it is not just about resource for implementing; it is also about evaluating. Very few of the changes that are made at the moment are properly evaluated to understand their impact. When we come back to that conversation about how you bring the public along with you, the public expect you to be able to show them evidence of how this has impacted air pollution levels, how this has impacted health and the potential knock-on effects for certain communities. Local authorities need to be able to evaluate the schemes and initiatives they are implementing, but they are working on a shoestring at the moment. They need extra resource to make sure that these changes have the type of impact they are looking to have.

Q70 **Geraint Davies:** Obviously, all parents feel they have a duty to protect their children and it is more than frustrating that parents simply cannot protect their children from the silent killers we are talking about. I understand that children in so-called clean air zones have 10% lower lung capacity. I was wondering whether you had any suggestions on improving this. I am particularly thinking of more clean air monitors outside schools to mobilise opinion among parents, so they know the risks they are suffering and can put pressure on local councils to stop idling of cars outside schools and take other measures, perhaps including improving indoor air quality in schools. Could we have Jemima first on what we should be doing about protecting our children in schools?

Jemima Hartshorn: There are a number of things that are really important around schools. A lot of councils are putting up school streets, across London in particular. It is slightly more difficult to implement them currently outside London. There needs to be much more stringent action on idling. Currently, the enforcement against idling is inadequate, so it needs some changes in legislation to make that effective. This is a lot about awareness and I agree that monitors would be really helpful in raising awareness among parents as to how bad air pollution is, and getting them involved and taking action.

I feel like, at a high level, in this Committee and other groups, the understanding is so strong on air pollution being so bad. I wish it was not up to parents to push for stuff. I wish it was for Government to lead on this and then make sure it is understood through a strong communication campaign why this is being done. We could then see action on air pollution and communication at the same time, whereas often it feels like it is the other way round: we need to mobilise people first and then we can hope Government will take the necessary leadership.

Q71 **Geraint Davies:** Kate, is there stuff that could be done, including staggering the starts of schools and encouraging people to work from home? What more could be done to protect our children in their schools and on the way to school?

Kate Langford: Monitoring is an important part of it, but I have two builds on the conversation. The Mayor of London has done a series of school air quality audits across the capital, but often schools do not have the money to implement any of the recommendations of those air quality audits. There needs to be some sort of resource to implement recommendations.

Secondly, parents' awareness of this issue is really important, but we should not rely on that, as Jemima says, because I worry about that increasing the inequalities we see. In the communities we are particularly focused on, a lot of the parents do not have time to join a campaign group. They would probably love to, but they do not have the time or the headspace. How can we ensure that we have a more systematic approach to tackling air quality around the schools that are most affected?

One thing we have been thinking about is how we can engage businesses that are operating near those school environments to tackle their air pollution emissions. Southwark is working on a concept called school superzones, which is looking at the 400-metre radius around the school and how you can engage businesses to change things like emissions from construction or machinery. They are looking at issues like that around that 400-metre radius.

Geraint Davies: Or burning rubbish.

Kate Langford: Yes, exactly.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar: I absolutely agree with what Kate and Jemima have been saying. It is wonderful to hear from the ground. I have nothing to add, but I agree with them.

Chair: Thank you very much to Jemima, Parveen and Kate for some very good evidence this afternoon, which we will put into our inquiry. With schools, it is about getting it home to parents that idling outside school is not a good idea. The point was made that more children cycle to school in Germany and other places than perhaps do here. Perhaps we do not always feel safe; I do not know what it is. On all these issues, we need to all work together to make a real difference. You made the point, Kate,

that we must evaluate the systems we put in place. We are inclined to tick the box and say, "That will work", but we do not necessarily go back to check that it has worked. We take that on board.

Thank you very much for your evidence. There is some evidence to come to us in writing, please, if you would drop us a line on that. Thank you to all three of you.

Examination of Witnesses

Witness: Paul Swinney and Subrah Krishnan-Harihara.

Q72 **Chair:** We have Subrahmaniam Krishnan-Harihara, head of research at Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. I think you want to be addressed as Subrah; that will certainly make life easier for me. Then Paul Swinney is director of policy and research at the Centre for Cities. First, would you like to say a little bit about yourselves?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: I am Subrahmaniam Krishnan-Harihara. I am head of research at Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, which is the largest accredited chamber in the UK. We represent about 4,500 businesses based in and around Greater Manchester. As part of the chamber of commerce network, which has 53 chambers, we represent over 55,000 businesses which collectively employ approximately 6 million workers in the UK.

Paul Swinney: Good afternoon. I work for the Centre for Cities. I am the director of policy and research there. We look at the 63 largest urban areas in the UK and their economies specifically. That ranges from places as small as Exeter through to London, which is obviously the largest.

Q73 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I have a very quick question to both of you. If you had one quick thing that you would do to improve air quality, what would it be?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: It is probably one and a half things. The first thing we need is a national policy on clean air and what clean air zones in different parts of the country will look like. At the moment, we have different situations, different clean air zones, different plans that are being drawn up in different regions. That only causes confusion. If we are talking about incentivising and supporting businesses to make that transition, let us have absolute clarity of what is expected. Then we can look at the support and the incentives needed to make the transition from where we are to where we want to be.

Paul Swinney: Provide clean air zones, London-style ULEZs, in all our major cities.

Chair: Those were good, short answers. Thank you very much.

Q74 **Geraint Davies:** I wanted to ask the witnesses how they felt cities and

businesses have been adapting to the pandemic and what the future holds, in particular in relation to air quality, given that people are doing more homeworking now. Should the focus of the Government be on encouraging more homeworking, through digital support and so on, to have a knock-on effect on air pollution and create a more healthy future? That could include the staggering of business start times, so overall there is less air pollution, less Covid transmission and a healthier future in the new tomorrow.

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: Yes, indeed. Even before the pandemic struck, some of the measures that you just referred to were being talked of. Many businesses have adopted some of those measures as well. The challenge with Covid is that it has accelerated various trends: homeworking, reduced commuting, etc. We saw something that was extraordinary. When the lockdown was imposed, we saw traffic go down. There was less congestion. That also meant air quality improved in various parts of the country.

However, once the opening up of the economy started and many businesses started bringing staff in, in batches, to their normal places of work, consumer confidence in public transport had been dented to such an extent that, within Greater Manchester, and I use Greater Manchester as an example here, public transport utilisation is at approximately 40% of what it was. Overall traffic on the roads is approximately 90% of pre-pandemic levels. When people are starting to go back, because of the reduced confidence with using public transport, they are using more and more private cars. At the same time, active travel, cycling, walking and so on, has gone up.

We can talk of other measures, such as flexible working. That has been implemented by many businesses. Flexible working and remote working are excellent options, with a couple of caveats. Two things came to light, and you are no doubt aware of this. There were the mental and physical health challenges with people working prolonged hours from home. Associated with that was the challenge that some people felt, particularly younger people living in apartments, where they did not have the dedicated space within their homes that they could use for working.

If we are talking of a future where there is a lot of homeworking, these are different challenges that we also need to tackle. Undoubtedly, we need to encourage more and more active travel. It also comes down to how quickly we can regain confidence in people's minds about using public transport as a safe way of getting back to work, or using it for leisure and travel.

Q75 **Geraint Davies:** Do you therefore think there is a case for pushing forward with part-time homeworking, so you spend half your week at work, for argument's sake, and half at home, and perhaps for subsidy of public transport from Government? Similar to your experience, I think in outer London congestion is now at 50%. If we want to move forward to have overall less pollution, it does not mean everyone has to work at

home. It might mean more of your working week is at home and you are subsidised to go on public transport, so we are not all in our cars. Do you agree with that?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: I would agree with that, yes. The future, at least for the next 12 to 18 months, looks like it is going to be a hybrid pattern of working where everyone spends a part of their working week at home, or in a remote location, and another part of their working week in the offices. With social distancing required at the moment, I think that is going to be the trend, but this is indicative of a long-term change in behaviour. More and more people will want to work from their homes.

In terms of the pricing of public transport, we need to have a wider discussion on the overall pricing strategy and the ticketing options that are available within public transport. If we consider season tickets, the current system of season tickets is geared for a five-day working week. If you are able to use that during the weekend for your leisure activities, that is a bonus. If we are saying that in the future we want to encourage more and more people to work, let us say, three days a week from home and two days in the office, or vice versa, we need to have a broader discussion on what ticketing options might be available, how they might be priced and if there are incentives for, say, starting very early in the morning, to help the staggered start that might be required for some businesses.

It also depends on having much more public transport capacity in some areas. There are spots in Greater Manchester where there is a concentration of freight and logistics businesses. These are businesses that tend to start very early on. There are industrial parks, etc. Those areas are underserved by public transport. We have anecdotal evidence of a small number of young people having refused work in those areas because they do not have a car and cannot use public transport, so it affects their employment prospects. There are wider benefits to encouraging public transport.

Q76 **Geraint Davies:** Paul, if everyone worked half time at home, it would double the amount of social distancing, because the offices would be half full. Similarly, if schools did a four-day week and the fifth day they were working online, you would have a 20% improvement of social distancing in school, less Covid transmission and less pollution. Do you have any thoughts about this homeworking/public transport conundrum and what the Government should do to encourage behaviour through tax or other measures?

Paul Swinney: We have just got hold of some data looking at nitrous oxide emissions across cities during the pandemic so far. We are still working and analysing the data. The interesting thing from that seems to be that levels of nitrogen oxides fell pretty much the least in London out of, I think, 38 cities so far. We look at 63 in total, trying to get up to that maximum. They fell the least in London of any city, despite London

having the highest share of people who, in principle, can work from home.

From that, I read that a lot of people in London are already taking public transport. Those jobs that can be done from home tend to be based in central London. We know that 90% of people who work in central London are using public transport, walking or cycling. It does not feel as if the work from home angle has had that much of an impact in London at least. That is partly because it has this public transport system that serves it. I would be cautious about the implications we think working from home will have, first, from that data.

The second thing is recognising the benefits that face-to-face interaction and working in the office have to the economy. Subrah has outlined some of them already. There are mental health implications, but there are also career development issues around being in the office, hearing all this information buzzing around and then developing your career as a result of learning from that, literally learning on the job. There are also benefits of having people coming together, face-to-face interaction, generating new ideas, and so on. That ends up pushing the economy on through new innovations and commercialising new ideas.

We might well see that people will start working from home more, so, as you suggested, four days in the office or three days in the office. To me the question feels more about, if there is a continued demand for businesses and jobs to be based within city centres in particular, how we adapt technologies and put incentives in place to develop new technologies to reduce the environmental impact of that. That is probably what we need to be thinking more of, rather than thinking that working from home is going to solve this issue.

Q77 **Geraint Davies:** In general, if people were travelling to the office less and there was less movement, even if it was public transport, there would be less pollution. There is a middle way, isn't there?

Paul Swinney: There would be. My point is that I do not think that reduction would perhaps be quite as large. As I say, we still need to analyse it in full, but the data we have so far suggests that the fall would perhaps not be as large as you might think. I do not think that is going to solve the problems. We saw that nitrogen oxide emissions in London were still relatively high, despite up to half the economy working from home over that period.

Q78 **Geraint Davies:** Subrah, I thought the NOx level fell quite dramatically, 40% or something. What was the pollution situation in Manchester again?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: It fell dramatically in the early stages of lockdown. In April and May it had significantly gone down, but it has now started creeping back up. Clearly, the imposition of further restrictions in the last two weeks will have a favourable effect on NOx emissions. We have the situation where, when there is lockdown and we are

constraining people from doing the things they would usually do, there is a favourable impact on air quality. When we revert to our normal practices, it has an unfavourable impact on air quality. Clearly, that is an unsustainable model in the long term, so we need to start looking at what other options there are.

Q79 **Geraint Davies:** What about the impact on unemployment of a lot of people working from home? Obviously people are not going to many sandwich shops and the like. That was one of the incentives, I guess, for the Prime Minister to say, "Get back in your car, go back to work and have a meal deal" or whatever it was. How do you see this panning out, in terms of the economy, for example in Manchester and other cities?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: One of the most talked about topics in the context of the pandemic and its impact is high streets and the retail shopping districts within both city centres and town centres. First, I will give you a bit of background as to the overall macroeconomic impact. This is drawn from the survey work we have done at Greater Manchester chamber. Since the end of March, we have done tracker surveys, 10 or 11 of them, and we have also had two quarterly economic surveys, which are a set-piece research activity.

Based on the data, we gather what is called a Greater Manchester index, which is a composite indicator for the city region's economy. The Greater Manchester index in Q2 was minus 31.7. Minus 31.7 is the lowest it has ever been, a full six points below what it was at the peak of the 2008-09 recession. In Q3, it is minus 9.2, so there has been a quarterly improvement.

There is a nuance there that the two quarterly data points by themselves do not reveal. The tracker surveys we have done show that much of the improvement we have seen in the third quarter took place in the month of July. This was the response to the opening up of retail, hospitality, etc. Since then, we have had six to seven weeks of economic stabilisation or stagnation. That is down to the fact that there was that immediate bounce back and then there has not been further sustenance. In the context of the recent restrictions that have been imposed, that means that fewer and fewer people are going to their city centre offices. Clearly, that has an impact on the aspects you just mentioned. There are fewer people in the city centre regions and fewer shoppers in the shops in the city centre.

Q80 **Robbie Moore:** Your answer fits in perfectly with the next question. The question is geared around cities, but I represent a town. Keighley is in my constituency, so I would be interested to know about the aspects for cities and towns. Their prosperity is very dependent on people visiting them to shop, for leisure, for work or for other activities, often based on road transport, as you have just been discussing. How can we boost cities' and towns' economies and avoid air pollution?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: That is a very interesting challenge there. It comes down to one or two things. First, I would recommend that we use Covid as an opportunity for bringing in a lot more pedestrianisation in city and town centres. If we bring in pedestrianisation and we can provide a retail, leisure and hospitality offer that is centred on that, we are going to have an economic boost to town and city centres without the heavy cost of air pollution that might come with our existing modes of operation.

Secondly, in terms of the local commute, this is a challenge that towns face much more than a city like Manchester. The access from suburban regions to Manchester city centre is often way better than the public transport access from suburban districts to local town centres. We need to think about that and how we use public transport as a lever for economic growth without that air pollution cost.

Thirdly, we need to very seriously consider how we encourage more and more active modes of travel such as walking and cycling. I am using Greater Manchester as an example, but I hope the picture is very similar and you can relate to that from other parts of the country. Clearly, there has been a lot of investment in cycling lanes and bringing in cycling infrastructure.

There are certainly options around that, but we should not lose sight of one thing: in the second quarter of 2020 nationally, the food and accommodation services sector declined by approximately 87%. An 87% decline in one sector is mind blowing. We need to be clear that there needs to be support for hospitality, leisure, food and accommodation services. Those businesses need support going into this. I think we can support them. Economic and financial support is one side of it. What is our long-term strategy for this? That can be done through increased pedestrianisation and having a varied offer within city and town centres.

Q81 **Robbie Moore:** Paul, what can local government and central Government do to stop people switching from public transport to cars?

Paul Swinney: First, we have to understand the patterns of economies across the country to then understand what people's incentives are as to whether they are getting in a car or getting on public transport. The reason why people in London use public transport to get to the centre of London is that it is just really difficult to get in by private transport. That is partly because there is a lot of congestion, so taking public transport, on the balance of the scales, means that it is about as quick as using private transport.

Then there is the issue that they have put extra incentives in there, like the congestion charging zone for example, and are now bringing in ULEZ too, which has a bit of a stick in there as well. All of a sudden, the balance of using public transport over private transport has very much weighed in that favour. On the whole, people respond to those incentives and they go in.

Why does that happen? That is because there is a cluster of lots and lots of jobs and economic activity in one place. That creates that congestion, which then means public transport is the better option. In places where congestion is not really an issue, getting the bus over getting in your private car does not win. You can get in your car and it gets you from A to B more quickly. You keep dry; you are not standing at the bus stop. It is easy to get in, because there is not that congestion, that concentration of activity, in the same way.

We have to be a bit careful about how we think we can get people to either switch to public transport, because it is a moral issue to do so, or get them to switch to active travel when the car is so much easier to take in those circumstances. In Keighley, for example, I think it is more difficult. In Bradford city centre, it is probably less difficult to bring that sort of stuff in, but it is still pretty difficult. Getting people to switch going into Leeds city centre should be much easier because there is that concentration of activity in one place. There are lots of people trying to get in, therefore lots of congestion, and all of a sudden public transport starts to become more attractive.

There are two issues in Leeds. The first is that we do not have a Transport for London-style model in Leeds, which means we do not have control of the transport system in the same way to provide that public transport. Also, we do not have the stick in there. We have not put the congestion charge in. We have not put the low emissions zone in because it has been delayed, for quite understandable reasons. There is an issue there about a number of places delaying the introduction of their clean air zones. We are not doing that sort of thing to try to get them to do the switch.

The point I want to make is that, where we are trying to encourage people to make those switches, we can only do it in very specific places where the incentives are in line or we can very easily shift the incentives to get them to change. If we are trying to get them to change to go into the centre of Telford, which is very car based, or Milton Keynes, for example, that is a very different proposition to trying to get them to change to go into the centre of Leeds.

In terms of the role of local government and national Government, I would echo quite a lot of what was said in the first session. As long as we understand the role of economic geography and the cluster of activity, and how that plays into incentives, the first thing for national Government is about trying to set the tone and minimum standards. The fact that we have not specified or reduced the limits of PM 2.5 in the Environment Bill to date is a bit disappointing. Bringing them down to WHO levels would have seemed like a fairly easy way to try to set the tone. Having said that, that is not the panacea in itself because you still see breaches and not necessarily any implications from that, but at least it sets the tone.

The second thing central Government can do is to give local authorities more money to implement these policies. As one of the earlier witnesses said, these things are costly and therefore the local authority does not necessarily have the financial incentive to do so. You could do that by tripling the size of the clean air zone fund, which is £220 million. You could say, "Let us make that £660 million to help us bring that sort of technology in".

On the local authority side, there needs to be more will to push this through. Some authorities have done it. I get the impression, from having spoken to civil servants in the past and seen certain actions of the local authorities, that they have dragged their feet a bit on some of this stuff over the last couple of years. Now Covid has come in, it has allowed them to push it back a little more, and yet people are dying as a result of this. Literally, the people they are serving are dying because we are not dealing with those air quality issues. That is a big thing to get hold of, to get them to understand and to push these policies through, with more financial support to assist in doing that.

Q82 **Robbie Moore:** I have one quick supplementary, which is actually more predominantly localised to me. It is that balance between driving economic activity and the impact on air quality. I am using a very quick example in my constituency of Keighley, where we have just had an application go through for the Aire Valley incinerator. One of the great big advantages promoted by the applicant was driving economic growth and jobs. On the flipside, there is a clear potential detrimental impact on air quality. From your point of view, how do you feel we should try to get policies right, so that air quality is driven higher up the agenda when these types of projects that are likely to drive economic activity are coming through?

Paul Swinney: The easiest way to do that is probably to put a tax on it. Levy extra taxes for the pollution that is put out. Exactly where you set that tax is a very difficult question, because you are asking, "How do you trade off jobs against health impacts and potential impacts on people staying alive or not?" I guess that is where we are with the Covid situation at the moment too. If you were to put a tax on the amount of air pollution that firm was putting out, in the way we do with other pollutants I guess, that would incentivise them to look at other modes of trying to reduce that tax burden. Encouraging innovation is what you want to do through the tax system. That is probably a national level policy to put in place, rather than a local one.

Q83 **Dave Doogan:** Subrah, the chamber of commerce in Manchester questioned, in the context of the Covid recovery plan, whether it was realistic at this time to seek to improve air quality and reduce congestion. What is your view on that position?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: Our view is that the time is ideal to take on some of those challenges. Covid is certainly a cost, but I think there is an opportunity. It is an opportunity to shift some of the behavioural aspects.

If we can improve the reliability of public transport, improve the safety element within our public transport and address the perception issues that people have with regard to utilisation of public transport, we have a tremendous opportunity to shift behaviour towards a strategy at both a national and a local level that prioritises green growth.

Clearly, incentives are needed for organisations. We probably need to spend some time discussing what is expected of businesses and then what role businesses can play. There are a variety of things there: innovation, the adoption of newer technologies, all those aspects.

Q84 **Dave Doogan:** We have touched on this with a couple of responses we have had, whereby some things need to be done centrally, whether it is in the context of clarity over strategy and purpose, or because there is a need for a taxation element to it, or a need for large-scale national funding. Would you say that trying to get going on this priority after Covid is an area where central Government need to act?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: I could not agree more. This is an area very much now for central Government. We need to have one national policy. We can think of examples: the diesel cars, the mandates, the commitments that have been made centrally to carbon neutrality and zero carbon. For all these issues, including air quality, we have to have one national policy with a certain set of targets. It is not going to work if we adopt a piecemeal approach. As was mentioned earlier, different local authorities and councils face different pressures in terms of the business demography, the unique challenges they have, strengths, weaknesses, financial constraints and all that. If we have one national policy with carrots and sticks, that will help us succeed in that.

Q85 **Chair:** This is a question to you both. I think the secret in a way is to get growth back after Covid, but do it in a greener way. Again, it is not a simple solution, because we want the economy to grow again. How do we incentivise the growth and green growth? Subrah, you mentioned this. How do we incentivise the green growth as we build the economy again?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: Let us look at what challenges businesses face at the moment. All the data shows that businesses face severe liquidity pressures. They have working capital concerns. There is a lot of spare capacity, which is causing deflationary pressures on the economy. Business confidence is low. The upshot of all that is that capital investment is probably not high on the business agenda at the moment. When we are talking of green growth, the first thing that comes to mind is what technologies businesses can adopt at this stage. Can we incentivise, support or subsidise the adoption of those technologies?

Specifically in terms of air quality, we know that the sale of new cars, for example, has gone down. However, the used car market seems to have recovered slightly compared to earlier in the year. If people are buying used cars, they are probably not buying low-emission or electric vehicles at this stage. The second, related, question is, in terms of incentivising

consumers, what we can do to encourage people switching over from polluting diesel vehicles to the newer low-emission or electric vehicles. It is about enabling those activities.

Infrastructure investment, such as cycling lanes and walkways, is extremely important. It is a very good way of bringing about green growth. Something that has struck me about the construction pipeline in some places, also in Greater Manchester, is that the pipeline for commercial office space seems to have fallen off a cliff. However, within the pipeline there are a lot of residential projects. We can look into the best standards for insulation and for low-carbon homes. That will give us growth.

The other area where there is lots of activity in the construction pipeline is in private industry. This is logistics, etc. Something that has obviously happened during the Covid pandemic is this big push towards electronic commerce and the delivery of goods into people's homes. Clearly that has some implications for clear air. Can we incentivise those businesses with big fleets of vans and heavy goods vehicles to switch over to cleaner vehicles? That will give us green growth. There are a lot of options there.

Paul Swinney: It is about identifying where we think we can have an impact and, in terms of recovery, where we can make some change. If we are talking about people going back to work and trying to make a swap in their mode of transport, to get them out of the car to some other form of transport, in principle we have been in a bit of an experiment over the last six months of introducing cycle lanes, not only in the UK but in other European cities. There is something to learn there: does it work or does it not? If it works, let us try to put that in as a permanent measure, rather than a temporary one.

Within that, we have to be careful about the incentives people face. If we put in a cycle lane in a pretty low-density area, the incentive for somebody to cycle is pretty low, because you will get in your car. We see that in new towns. If you go to Harlow or Stevenage, they were built with loads of cycle lanes in them and nobody uses them because it is so easy to get around in the car. We are only going to really have that sort of benefit or long-term impact if we do it in places like Birmingham, Manchester, London and Glasgow.

In terms of the delivery vans, it comes down to how you set up the incentives. If you were to put a ULEZ-style model or a clean air zone in different parts of the country, you would start to see businesses respond. It is quite interesting from the perspective of someone who has just bought a used car that, if you go on the used car websites, all of them now tell you whether your car is ULEZ compliant. That is for anybody trying to buy a car across the country, who might never ever go to London, and yet that is coming up and filtering through. If you have a great push at a local level on bringing in these policies, it changes incentives, for the private consumer or for businesses.

To go back to the previous question, central Government have a role to play in setting the agenda, setting the tone, perhaps putting some money behind this. Local authorities have a responsibility here too and they have the powers to put in things like clean air zones or congestion charging zones. By and large, pretty much all of them have chosen not to do that, bar probably London and Glasgow, over the last 20 years. I do not think we should let local authorities off the hook for this sort of thing, but they need central Government support to be able to do that.

Chair: Thank you both for those quite varied answers. It is not one size fits all, is it? Different parts of the country perhaps need slightly different solutions and incentives.

Q86 **Barry Gardiner:** Thank you to our witnesses, because you have given us a wealth of detail. Chair, I wanted to pick up on your opening question to them, which I thought was superb. You asked them what the single most important thing that could be done was. I think I am right in saying that, Subrah, you started off by talking about the importance of a national framework of low-emission zones. Paul, I think you agreed that that was the key to this. Can you explain for us what it is about not having that framework that makes life so much more difficult? I know it is sort of turning the question the other way round, the way bus operators shift their fleets to areas that do not have those restrictions. Give us good examples so we can understand the policy better.

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: That is a very important consideration there. To flip it is to get a different flavour of those details. Let us consider recent developments in the post-Covid or Covid world, as we are in it at the moment. Various cities and towns started planning for the implementation of clear air zones. In Greater Manchester, it has been postponed from April 2021 to April 2022. Leeds was going to start the journey very soon, but now doubts have been cast about whether Leeds might even need a clear air zone, because Covid has had a favourable impact on air quality. Similar noises have been made in Birmingham.

That causes a lot of confusion. For a business that is trying to set up a base somewhere in the north, it is given the option: "You can go to Greater Manchester. In 15 months' time, you are going to hit a new policy, which is a clean air plan, and then you have to pay a daily penalty for operating your heavy goods vehicle fleet", while in Leeds there is perhaps no clean air plan. That might position Greater Manchester as a less attractive business destination, so that is one consequence.

Q87 **Barry Gardiner:** Can I clarify? You are saying that, unless there is this national framework, the reverse auction between local authorities to attract business into their area operates as a disincentive to adopting a clean air zone.

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: Absolutely, it does.

Q88 **Barry Gardiner:** Paul, is there a different aspect that you would like to

add to that, or would you like to perhaps reinforce what Subrah was saying?

Paul Swinney: I would probably disagree with Subrah to some extent. Yes, there is an element of that at play, but it did not stop London bringing in the congestion charge. It did not stop London bringing in the low-emission zone and then hopefully extending that as well.

Q89 **Barry Gardiner:** There was a lot of battle in London to get it done.

Paul Swinney: Interestingly, they were happy to wear the scars of that and push it through. Local government elsewhere in the country has not been prepared to do that, with the exception of Glasgow. That is quite interesting. Subrah made the point about local authorities delaying and now saying, "I am not sure whether we need that any more". Hang on. We are not going to see permanent improvements in air quality because of Covid. We should expect that this is going to be fairly short term. We should expect that people are going to continue to die in numbers way above what we think is acceptable. We should be pushing through with these sorts of things because of the health implications they have.

In terms of the benefits you then sell to businesses, you say, "Hang on. Our air is much cleaner here now. You are not going to lose as many people because of days off because of bad health". That is a good thing in terms of being able to attract them in. The tone needs to be changed there at the local level. Local authorities need to grasp this. I will come back to your national point in a second. It is really interesting that local authorities are happy to declare climate emergencies: "We are on the side of the angels. We are all about the green economy. We declare a climate emergency". Local authorities can do very little about climate change.

Q90 **Barry Gardiner:** You want them to put their money where their mouth is and I entirely agree with you.

Chair: Yes, tick the box.

Paul Swinney: Climate change is an international issue. There is nothing, or very little, they can do about it. Air quality is an ultra-local issue. There is a lot they can do about it. When you then see the action and what is being put in place, it does not really match up to what is going on. I am not talking about just delaying clean air zones over the last six months; I am talking about what has not been done over the last 20 years.

A national framework helps in giving local authorities cover to do these sorts of things, which is a good thing. The question is whether they would still do it even if that was there, and I do not know. The impressive thing is what London has done over the last 20 years. What Birmingham was proposing was impressive. It is disappointing to read that they may well be getting cold feet about that, although we would have to ask them whether that is actually the case. That would be very disappointing. I

know Bristol is doing something, to some extent, in terms of banning diesel cars. That may not be our recommendation, but at least it has been prepared to have that political battle and take on quite a strong motorists' lobby where a lot of other places have not.

The final thing is that all our evidence has focused on vehicles. As was made clear in the first session, vehicles are a very large contributor to nitrogen oxide emissions and less of a contributor to PM 2.5. That is where wood-burning stoves come in. I do not think we should lose sight of that. It was a little alarming to see John Lewis reporting last week that it had seen a spike in sales of wood-burning stoves, with people expecting to be stuck at home over winter. That is something for us to think about. Again, there is an issue there about national Government empowering local government to deal with those sorts of things, through giving them the powers to put in smoke-free zones, for example. Actually, many London boroughs have had the powers to do that for a long time as well.

Q91 **Barry Gardiner:** I wanted to move to the Chair's second point, which was about recovery. Subrah, to a certain extent you have covered this. Unless it is a green, sustainable recovery, it is not a recovery. I wanted to draw out from you the ways in which it has already been shown that moving over to renewables, doing the sorts of things you were talking about in terms of home insulation and energy efficiency, creates jobs and wealth in the local area. If you want a recovery, the best way of doing it is to make it sustainable and green. I wonder if you want to briefly comment on that.

Paul Swinney: If the Government need to be creating jobs, there is an opportunity to be doing something by linking in the green agenda. They have made some announcements around that. There is a question about whether they could go further, particularly on home insulation. Ultimately, in the short term, a recovery that gets more people back into employment would be seen as a recovery full stop. In the longer term, we definitely need to be thinking about how we try to adjust to a green economy. That has an impact on the performance of the economy in the longer term. If we destroy the environment around us or we are killing people around us, that is not a particularly great way of trying to grow the economy more.

The green agenda encompasses climate change and air quality. Some of the things the Government could do on job creation, through home insulation for example, are more climate change issues than air quality issues. For the air quality stuff, the policies are probably about trying to disincentivise people to undertake activities that currently make local air quality bad. That would be using the most polluting wood-burning stoves or choosing the car over other forms of transport.

Barry Gardiner: Of course, if you are insulating your homes better you are reducing the energy used to heat them, and predominantly in the UK that is fossil fuel and gas.

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: Let us also think of what sectors we can encourage. We have a situation where some of our big employment sectors are actually going to shrink. That shrinkage might be longer term, talking of retail and associated areas particularly. We need to bear that in mind. In terms of the green agenda, which also includes air quality, we can have a recovery. There are big changes we can implement.

There is something else that could also play into it. The younger generation of the workforce actually demands some of these changes. There is a lot that businesses can do to make those improvements within their own areas.

Q92 **Barry Gardiner:** The Committee has taken evidence that suggests the Environment Bill puts an onus on local authorities, but they have no control over key arterial and motorway routes. What powers do local authorities have to make the sorts of investment and changes that are needed to tackle air quality, given the other challenges they have? What local opposition do they often face when they try to do that, and how do they overcome that?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: I will touch upon the opposition part. When the clean air plan was first being talked of within Greater Manchester, one of the main concerns expressed by businesses was that the timeframe was too short. That concern primarily came from operators of fleets: vans, heavy goods vehicles, coaches and buses. The opposition was based on the fact that some of these businesses are buying their vehicles with a five to seven-year replacement cycle. If a plan comes into effect in 15 months' time, the vehicles that have been purchased even in the last three or four years are probably no longer usable without paying the penalty.

The national framework can set the broad parameters of what kind of emission standards we expect and what the minimum requirements are. Local authorities can then implement some of the infrastructure. Again, that might require funding support from central Government. Local authorities can do that within the areas that they have control over.

The one missing piece of the puzzle is of course highways and motorways. I live 500 metres away from a motorway. There can be as many polluting vehicles as you would like on the motorway. It does not affect the Greater Manchester clean air plan. These are the contradictions that local authorities are sometimes facing. That perhaps brings about a lowest common denominator approach, rather than asking, "What are the higher standards that we should all be aspiring to?"

Paul Swinney: Local authorities have the ability to bring in a clean air zone. Some of them have chosen not to. Some of them have chosen to bring something in, but what they are suggesting is a bit dubious. They are ducking tackling the issue because of the local opposition from motorists or otherwise. Some have attempted to bring something in that

is much stricter. They have the power to do that. It is the political will to do it that is missing in a number of places.

Beyond that, there are definitely issues around controls of local roads. That has definitely benefited the Greater London Authority and the mayoralty. TfL controls quite a lot of roads in London, whereas that is not the case in a number of other cities. That is something to look at, but it is not the barrier to putting a clean air zone in. It is political will plus cash. If there was more cash behind it from a central Government perspective, perhaps that would make it a little easier.

Q93 **Barry Gardiner:** Would you recommend that, in major conurbations like Manchester or Leeds, they should be given the control that TfL has over major arterial routes?

Paul Swinney: Yes. All our major cities should have the same powers that London has through TfL. That has a whole range of benefits, one of which is around trying to deal with air pollution.

Q94 **Barry Gardiner:** You think that should be a recommendation of this Committee.

Paul Swinney: Yes.

Chair: You are leading the witness, Barry, but it is a good point nonetheless. I will accept that.

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: The pot of cash that local authorities need is extremely important. I know from the experience here in GM that approximately £150 million was asked for. A lot of it was to be spent on the fleet renewals and the active travel infrastructure. Approximately £40 million has been granted, the bulk of it for the ANPR infrastructure, so we can find out who is not compliant and who is compliant. No money is available for the essential elements of this plan. The funding aspect for local authorities is also extremely important.

Barry Gardiner: That was really helpful.

Chair: Ian, would you like a supplementary?

Ian Byrne: No, I could not top Barry there. He has asked everything that I would want to ask. He touched on the funding issues. It is a fantastic time to implement this, but the cuts we have had as a local council make it near impossible. That is a hugely important point that has just been raised.

Q95 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you, Subrah and Paul, for being before us today and for some excellent evidence. I think we have covered some of this in previous questions, including Barry's questions. I guess my question is a final one about clean air zones to sum up, so it is really a parting comment about that. As we know and have discussed earlier in the session, clean air zones have been delayed by the pandemic. What role

should clean air zones have as part of any recovery that protects air quality? What else do you think the Government could be doing to help cities implement these zones?

Subrah Krishnan-Harihara: This is one area where I might have a slightly different opinion to Paul. All the local authorities have had the power to introduce clean air zones. The current economic environment and the impact that the implementation of a clean air zone might have is very uncertain. It is a somewhat unhelpful environment for the introduction of clean air zones at this stage. That is primarily because of the amount of funding and effort that businesses are going to need to make that transition within the prescribed timeframe.

Having said that, there is no doubt that clean air zones and such requirements are essential in most of the bigger towns and cities in this country. Without the carrot and the stick—the stick being the legal mandate for implementing clean air zones—I do not think we are going to have a longer-term change. At the moment, from the perspective of the cities that are in the process of either planning for or developing clean air zones, it seems to be all stick and no carrot.

Q96 **Dr Hudson:** I guess this is referring back to our previous session earlier today, where we were talking about some joined-up thinking and approaches between local government and central Government, incentives and partnerships. That chimes in nicely with some of the evidence we have heard earlier today. Can I throw that question now to you, Paul, as to what you think about clean air zones and their role? What can the Government do, working with local government, to help facilitate this process?

Paul Swinney: I take Subrah's point about the pressure on businesses at the moment, which is definitely something to be considered. I am concerned about how you then set incentives for people. Some businesses in city centres, if the clean air zone was in a city centre, would have to pay for access. Having said that, if you are a professional services business, from a business perspective you are probably not going to carry a large charge, in terms of a clean air zone. It will be employees that carry the charge. You are then trying to incentivise those employees to change their approach to how they travel in. There is a question about how much of this burden actually would fall on businesses, which I am not clear on, given the nature of businesses we see in city centres.

Secondly, the data that we have to date, which we are still analysing, would suggest that nitrogen oxide emissions have gone back to pretty much where they were pre-pandemic. When you look at congestion data, in a lot of places it seems that is not far off the same position too. We know that is killing people. Someone is not going to drop down dead tomorrow because of what they have been breathing, but it builds up and has implications in terms of life expectancy, sick days and things like that.

It feels like the rationale for the policy intervention is still there, and I do not really see the huge rationale for then pushing that off into the future. If local authorities had not dragged their feet on this for the last five years roughly, let us say, when there appears to have been a lack of action, maybe I would have some sympathy with a further delay. The delays even further come off the back of those delays in the first place. If someone was cynical, which obviously I am not, they would maybe think that is just a way for them to try to kick something even further down the road. That is the concern I would have there. It is a question for us to ask, at the very least.

In terms of the support from national Government, our recommendation would be the tripling of the clean air fund from £220 million to £660 million to give local authorities the financial support to bring these things in. We recognise that introducing a clean air zone is not a cost-free option in the short term, because you have a big infrastructure investment to make. Of course, you are then going to make money off the back of it, but there is an upfront infrastructure cost that Government could assist with to help with some of these things.

Dr Hudson: Thank you very much. That is really helpful.

Chair: Can I thank Subrah and Paul very much for a really good session this afternoon? You have given us some real gems of wisdom there that may well find their way into our report, but I must not second guess that. I will be told off by the Clerks here for second guessing what we put in there. We have drilled down on some really practical ideas. Thank you both very much for a great session. I thank members too for very good questions. Thank you all very much.