

Exclusive – The Guardian , w/c 25 January 2021

- **On eve of Environment Bill, city leaders call for tougher pollution targets and £1.5bn air pollution fund**
- **Mother of Ella Kissi-Debrah warns “we don’t have time because children are continuing to actually die”**
- **Letter urges PM to go “further and faster” on air pollution**

A group of a dozen mayors, business leaders and NGOs have joined forces to urge the Prime Minister to commit to tougher air pollution targets following the inquest into the tragic death of Ella Kissi-Debrah.

The cross-party group, including the Labour Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and the Conservative Mayor of the West of England, Tim Bowles, have signed a joint letter along with city leaders from Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and the North of Tyne to urge Boris Johnson to “enshrine in law” World Health Organisation air pollution guidelines by 2030 as part of the Environment Bill. The Mayors represent around 17 million people collectively, more than a quarter of the UK population.

The group have backers from the business community too, including the Vice President of Enterprise Rent-A-Car, the largest car rental businesses in the world.[\[1\]](#)

The group is calling for a **£1.5 billion boost to Government spending on air pollution**, as “the emerging link between air pollution, inequality and vulnerability to the impacts of COVID-19 only intensifies the need for bold action to reduce human exposure.

Previous research published by UK100 has shown that a £1.5bn fund would remove nearly half a million of the most polluting cars and vans from the road and incentivise people into cleaner vehicles, public transport, cycling and walking.[\[2\]](#)

The group have called for a clear commitment to WHO air pollution targets in the Environment Bill, which is due to be debated in Parliament this week (Tuesday 26 January).

Campaigners and regional leaders fear that without a cast iron guarantee from Government that environmental protections will be upheld in a post-Brexit landscape, that progress on tackling air pollution could be jeopardised.

The letter notes that “A year has passed since the Clean Air Summit at City Hall, when a cross-party coalition of Mayors and local leaders, collectively representing around 20 million people across England, met with the Director General of the World Health Organisation, NHS leaders and UK Government Ministers and established a clear consensus... for concerted government-backed action on air pollution, offering a positive return on public investment and big opportunities for UK manufacturing.”

Rosamund Kissi-Debrah, said:

“We’ve got a very small window now to influence this bill and it’s something we can actually do. We need to take action now which will have long term benefits.

“People act as though we have time - we don’t have time because children are continuing to actually die. They are spread all over the country so we don’t see it. The only time we get to see it is when there’s an inquest and it’s suddenly in the news, which is not acceptable.”

Polly Billington, Director of UK100, a group of over 100 local authorities that co-ordinated the letter, said:

“We cannot wait any longer to prevent more tragic deaths like Ella’s. 40,000 people die prematurely in the UK every year from air pollution. We need to act with the fierce urgency of now, not just to serve Ella’s memory, but to prevent more needless loss of life.”[\[3\]](#)

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said:

“The confirmation that air pollution played a role in the tragic death of nine-year-old Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah must be a turning point in the national effort to cut air pollution. Including WHO recommended limits in the Environment Bill will be one of the most effective ways of ensuring other families do not have to suffer the same heartbreak as Ella’s have. Any delay in ensuring these targets are met would put more children and vulnerable people at risk. We are already taking world-leading action in London to tackle air pollution, but we need the Government, which has been far too slow to act, to step up too. Ministers must now learn the lessons from the coroner’s conclusion in Ella’s case and do more to tackle the deadly scourge of air pollution in London and across the country.”

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, said:

“Toxic air is a real injustice which hits the poorest parts of our society hardest and contributes to at least 1,200 deaths each year in Greater Manchester. That’s why tackling air pollution is a priority across our city region and by introducing a comprehensive package based around the largest Clean Air Zone outside London, we can bring NO₂ levels on local roads within legal limits as soon as possible, to clean up our air now - and for future generations. But, we need concrete commitment from national government to provide sufficient funds to support those vehicle owners, many of whom live in the communities most affected, who have made previous vehicle choices in good faith. Beyond this, we want to ensure that the Environment Bill includes World Health Organisation standards for air quality, and will continue to press Government for concrete plans and funding commitments to bring that about in a manner that serves the interests of our communities, our businesses and all of our health.”

ENDS

Full text of letter below.

Full text of Letter:

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

22 January 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

We are pleased that the Government is now prioritising climate and environmental action, exemplified by your Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution.

However, we need to go further and faster.

A year has passed since the Clean Air Summit at City Hall, when a cross-party coalition of Mayors and local leaders, collectively representing around 20 million people across England, met with the Director General of the World Health Organisation, NHS leaders and UK Government Ministers and established a clear consensus:

1. Air pollution – too often at lethal and illegal levels – is a profoundly important public health issue, with serious and often life-changing consequences for people who are exposed;
2. The impact of air pollution on public health places huge and avoidable pressure – in financial and capacity terms – on the National Health Service;
3. There is a clear business case for concerted government-backed action on air pollution, offering a positive return on public investment and big opportunities for UK manufacturing.

Your mandate as Prime Minister includes welcome commitments on air quality, but there is still no clear signal as to what target and timescale will be set for air pollution.

We acknowledge the scale of the COVID-19 crisis and the pain, disruption and uncertainty it continues to cause. We hope you agree that the emerging link between air pollution, inequality and vulnerability to the impacts of COVID-19 only intensifies the need for bold action to reduce human exposure.

With the Environment Bill back in Parliament we urge you to take forward two urgent and immediate actions:

1. Include a clause in the Environment Bill that enshrines in law the commitment to achieve World Health Organisation guidelines by 2030.
2. Provide sufficient additional local and combined authority funding to tackle air pollution – at least £1.5 billion extra. Despite long-term spending plans being placed on hold, the Chancellor has acknowledged the need for health and infrastructure investment to be brought forward without delay, and action on clean air can't wait.

These measures are important, achievable and overdue. Their delivery would help us overcome the present barriers – lack of investment, lack of a clear national legal framework, and lack of powers – and enable us to work in partnership with government to eliminate the scourge of polluted air and its impact on the public, now and for generations to come.

Yours sincerely,
Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London
Tim Bowles, Mayor of the West of England
Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester
Jamie Driscoll, Mayor of the North of Tyne

Dan Jarvis, Mayor of Sheffield City Region
Steve Rotherham, Mayor of Liverpool City Region
Polly Billington, Director, UK100 (representing 100+ local authorities)
Ben Lawson, Vice President Strategy Europe, Enterprise Rent-A-Car
Nicky Phillpot, Director, UK Health Alliance on Climate Change
Chris Pateman-Jones, CEO, Connected Kerb
Ben Sheppard, Partner and Head of Energy, Infrastructure & Government, Walker Morris LLP
Wiktor Warchalowski, Founder & CEO, Airly

Population of Mayoral Areas

Area	Population
Greater London	8,986,000
Greater Manchester	2,807,000
Merseyside (Liverpool)	1,409,000
West of England	1,100,000
Sheffield City Region	1,800,000
North of the Tyne	816,000
TOTAL	16,918,000

[1] The Enterprise Rent-A-Car brand is part of the world's largest car rental provider – as measured by revenue, fleet, and employees. Source: <https://www.enterprise.co.uk/en/car-hire/locations.html#:~:text=The%20Enterprise%20Rent%2DA%2DCar,over%2070%20countries%20and%20territories>.

[2] <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/give-drivers-2k-to-scrap-diesels-say-city-leaders-brml0vsq>

[3] Each year in the UK, around 40,000 deaths are attributable to exposure to outdoor air pollution <https://www.replondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/every-breath-we-take-lifelong-impact-air-pollution>