



PRESS RELEASE

UK Government accused of “dereliction of duty” as it misses legal deadline for setting new air quality targets — just months after local leaders came together to call for more clean air ambition

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- UK100 has accused the government of a “dereliction of duty” after it missed the deadline for setting out new environmental targets, including on air quality, as required by the flagship 2021 Environment Act
- The missed deadline comes after the Mayor of London joined local and regional authorities in signing a letter to the DEFRA Secretary of State pledging to go further than the UK government in tackling the air pollution crisis
- Cross-party signatories include London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, Leader of Wiltshire Council, Richard Clewer, Leader of Bath and North East Somerset Council, Kevin Guy, and Leader of Brighton & Hove City Council, Phélim Mac Cafferty.
- The letter pledged mayors and local leaders to adopt WHO air pollution limits by 2030, ahead of the then UK Government’s 2040 proposal

As [green organisations band together](#) to criticise the Government’s failure to meet its own legal deadline for setting new air quality targets, UK100 is adding their voice to the chorus of condemnation.

UK100 is the UK’s only local authority network dedicated solely to Net Zero and Clean Air action.

UK100 Chief Executive, Polly Billington, says:

"The Government's decision to ignore the legally-binding deadline to set new targets to reduce our exposure to deadly air pollution is a dereliction of duty. We welcomed The Environment Bill as a sign of hope that the Government was taking the air quality crisis seriously. The new Defra Secretary must act quickly — and decisively — to restore that trust.

"The plan, [proposed in March](#), to meet World Health Organisation (WHO) limits on the deadliest pollutants by 2040 was already lacking ambition. And, in June,



cross-party local and regional leaders from the UK100 network pledged to meet the WHO target in their regions by 2030. They called on the Government to, at least, match their ambition."

The joint letter from cross-party mayors and local leaders was sent on Clean Air Day, which coincided with a [report from the National Audit Office](#) that exposed the Government's air failings.

The [letter to the Environment Secretary](#) was coordinated by UK100 and signed by more than 20 mayors and leaders, including Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, UK100 Co-presidents Tracy Brabin and Richard Clewer, and Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Green leaders from across the country.

The letter urges the Defra Secretary to:

- Bring forward the UK's air quality target to 2030 in line with the WHO's interim guideline and provide local leaders with the powers and funding to meet this target.
- Put in place a longer term target to meet the WHO's updated guidelines — half of the interim limit.
- Establish a national public awareness campaign around the health impacts of air pollution and its causes, including domestic wood burning.

At the time of signing the letter, Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, said:

"The passing of the new Environment Act last year should have provided the impetus Government needed to tackle some of the most pressing environmental concerns of our age."

"Instead, we're being offered nothing but more dither and delay as ministers set unambitious targets that condemn yet another generation of children to the risk of developing stunted lungs, asthma and a whole host of other health issues."

"We've done the research, we're taking the world-leading action, we know that here in London we can achieve the Government's target for PM2.5 a decade earlier than they are proposing by introducing measures proven to be effective. There is no reason for national government not to match the scale of our ambition for the health of Londoners."

"The setting of targets should never be seen as an end in and of itself, but strategic and measurable targets can make a huge difference in working to protect our environment and our city's residents from the consequences of pollution. That is why I urge ministers to think again about the scope of these targets and commit to doing much more to protect the next generation from the scourge of toxic air."

Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire and UK100 Co-president, said:



"Within West Yorkshire, we're doing everything in our power to clean up the air – including investing in electric buses, electric vehicle charging points and helping people to walk and cycle more."

"But one in twenty deaths in our region is linked to poor air quality and that is why it's crucial that we meet the WHO's target for PM_{2.5} by 2030."

"As local leaders, we understand the need to work across both political and geographical borders, and we want to work with the Government to ensure our residents can breathe easily and safely."

Richard Clewer, Leader of Wiltshire Council and UK100 Co-president, said:

"It isn't just our big cities that have air quality problems. There are parts of Wiltshire which are impacted, for example, Westbury where lorries constantly run on the A350 directly outside of people's front doors."

"Councils have some ability to influence pollution, but we need more support from government legislation to reduce all forms of particulate pollution. Some of our problems are on the A36, a road managed by National Highways, which also means that government assistance is critical to tackling those issues. If we are to properly act as good stewards of the environment we need to look to reduce pollution wherever we can."

In light of the deadline passing, Polly adds:

"I urge the Environment Secretary to listen to the plea from local and regional leaders across the country who are desperate to clean up the air in their towns and cities. They can't do it alone."

"The Government needs to urgently step up its action on clean air and bring forward its goal to meet WHO guidelines. At the same time, ministers need to enable local leaders to meet their air quality ambitions by providing the powers and support they need to implement regional air pollution plans that mean residents can breathe easily."

"Action on clean air comes with added benefits, as UK100's recent [Clean Air Net Zero \(CANZ\) report](#) made clear. Many of the measures that will help the UK progress on cleaning up our air will also accelerate action on Net Zero, cut health costs, enhance our economy and improve everyone's quality of life."

UK100's CANZ report was recently cited by the [Public Accounts Committee Tackling local air quality breaches](#) report calling on the Government to take a more integrated approach to air quality action.

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At the time of signing the letter, Phélim Mac Cafferty, Leader of Brighton & Hove City Council, said:

“We’re taking ambitious action in Brighton & Hove to tackle air pollution and battle climate change. The city’s [Carbon Neutral 2030 programme](#) will improve air quality through expanding our public Bikeshare scheme, making it easier to walk, upgrading the exhausts of forty buses, purchasing four new electric refuse collection vehicles, developing a hydrogen fuel hub and rolling out e-cargo bikes. We’re doing all of this and more while we work with schools and businesses to spread awareness about the serious dangers of toxic air.”

“We’re close to achieving the 2010 World Health Organisation guidelines for fine particulate pollution in outdoor air and doing everything we can to ensure clean, safe air. But we need strong national legislation to support our efforts. So we fully support the call for ministers to go further and faster to clean up air.”

“It’s crucial that we meet the World Health Organization’s recommended guidelines for air quality levels by 2030. Not only will this set us on a pathway to clean air across the UK, but it will also deliver significant improvements for public health, the economy, and the climate.”

And Kevin Guy, Leader of Bath and North East Somerset Council, said:

“I fully support UK100’s request for this government to take a robust position with respect to setting targets on particulate matter pollution. In Bath we have already seen improvements in air quality since introducing a Clean Air Zone.”

“Bath’s zone was launched in March last year and is helping to reduce nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution. We have yet to receive the formal assessment from the Joint Air Quality Unit, but our data shows that NO₂ concentrations in the zone have reduced by 21% since the baseline year, 2019 (pre-Covid). This is despite traffic flows in Bath largely returning to pre-pandemic levels by the middle of the year and significant highway works.”

“Air quality and traffic flows have been monitored outside of the zone to determine if the charges have simply displaced traffic and associated emissions, but our findings show that NO₂ concentrations in the urban area outside of the zone (but within Bath, Bathampton and Batheaston) have reduced by 22% since 2019.”

WHO limits

The letter focused on limits for PM_{2.5} pollution as the deadliest form of particulate matter pollution — a broad term describing the mixture of solids and liquids, including carbon, chemicals, sulphates, nitrates, mineral dust, and water in the air.



PM_{2.5} particles are tiny enough to be invisible to the naked eye and small enough to pass through the lungs, get carried in the bloodstream, and pass into other organs.

Generally, they come from the combustion of solid and liquid fuels, power generation, domestic heating and road vehicles.

Recognising that PM_{2.5} pollution is linked to [thousands of preventable deaths every year in the UK](#), the letter from local leaders calls on the Government to address the "limitations of local authority powers" and introduce a "national policy" to tackle "all of the different sources of PM_{2.5}".

Information on signatories

Leadership	Authority
	Leeds City Council
	Liverpool City Region / Mayor of Liverpool
	Bristol City Council / Mayor of Bristol
	Leicester City Council
	Oxford City Council
	Cambridge City Council
	Newcastle City Council
	Nottingham City Council
	Bath and NE Somerset
	SYCA / Mayor of South Yorkshire
Minority	Brighton and Hove
Coalition	Oxfordshire County Council
Coalition	Swale
	Hertfordshire
	Wiltshire
Coalition	Cambridgeshire
Coalition	Lancaster
Coalition	York
	WYCA / Mayor of West Yorkshire
	GLA / Mayor of London



 Cornwall

About UK100

UK100 is a network of the most ambitious local leaders working towards Net Zero as soon as possible but no later than 2045. We help them collaborate to take decisive action in their communities.

Our members represent more than 37 million people in towns, cities and counties across the UK.

We facilitate knowledge-sharing between members, partnership-building and leadership mentoring. And support them to harness their collective power to affect vital national change.

Warm homes, affordable energy, clean air, and healthy landscapes make thriving communities.

And UK100 members have pledged to deliver a Net Zero future that delivers for people and planet.

[UK100.org](https://www.uk100.org)



UK100 members across the UK

