

[The air you breathe: How Wales is tackling deadly air pollution](#)

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[A recent report by the Royal College of Physicians](#) reported that as many as 1,300 people a year die prematurely in Wales from breathing polluted air.

Across the UK the number is estimated at 40,000 and reportedly costs £27 billion a year. The problem is now so severe that World Health Organisation [issued a report](#) suggesting global air pollution poses a bigger threat than HIV and Ebola.

Air quality is a major issue in the UK. [Only five days into 2017 London managed to eclipse](#) its entire annual EU air pollution allowances. Clearly 'the big smoke' still hasn't outgrown its 1950's nickname as it regularly records the worst air pollution levels in the UK.



Wales has its own sizeable slice of the pollution-pie. A [road in Caerphilly](#)

reportedly clocks the second highest concentrations of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) in the UK. The road, which is thought to be the most polluted outside London, exceeded NO₂ limits on 60 occasions in 2016; 42 times more than allowed under EU law.

NO₂ is a pollutant emitted by all combustion engines, although diesel engines are the worst. The gas can cause inflammation of the airways and irritation to the eyes. It also exacerbates existing respiratory conditions such as asthma.

UK Air Quality Strategy

Up to now, the UK's primary assault on air pollution has been the '[UK Air Quality Strategy](#)'. The strategy was published in 2007 and provides objectives to meet and retain certain air quality standards. In recent years, the strategy has [come under fire](#)



for its ineffectiveness, leading the [Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#) Select Committee to publish a [40-page review](#) of the measures in 2016. The document criticised [DEFRA](#)'s handling of the issue saying that 'the Local Government Association, considered that DEFRA failed to take a "coherent, cross-government approach"'.

Last month, DEFRA has published a new [draft strategy](#) on air quality. The document, which caused stir after the [UK Government lost a high court battle](#) to delay its release, sets out a more contemporary action plan.

UK Draft Strategy

The draft strategy contains actions that are to be rolled out across the UK. Air quality is a devolved competence, and legislation such as the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act](#) can provide momentum to address the air pollution problem. The Act, which encourages public bodies to make sustainable choices in line with well-being goals, includes assessments of local well-being and an indicator to measure NO₂ pollution in the air.

The Wales-specific section of the draft strategy draws directly from the Act's principles;

Public bodies are required to plan and act for the long term and think laterally about what they can achieve [...]. Air quality can have fundamental impacts on human health, affecting both the quality and duration of peoples' lives. Reducing levels of air pollution [...] will contribute, either directly or through associated impacts, to the majority of the Well-being Goals.

In England, the proposals have a different emphasis focussing instead on '[Clean Air Zones](#)'. These are described as 'an area where targeted action is taken to improve air quality'. This been welcomed by motoring organisations with [Gerry Keaney, Chief Executive of the BVRLA saying](#) 'We've long called for a national framework that would require consistent Clean Air Zone (CAZ) emission standards, so it's good to see this being published today.'



Not everyone agrees. The Mayor of London, [Sadiq Khan, said on Facebook](#): 'We've dragged the government kicking and screaming through the courts to produce these belated proposals – but they are toothless and woefully inadequate.'

Rumours of a diesel scrappage scheme that could see rewards for owners who scrap their vehicles surfaced prior to the strategy's publication. However, the strategy claims only it will 'accelerate road vehicle fleet turnover to cleaner vehicles' with no mention of a specific scheme.

The actions within the strategy also revealed a plan for a new Welsh Government-led consultation. The consultation, which will happen in the next 12 months, will propose a 'Clean Air Zone Framework for Wales'. According to the strategy 'the Welsh Government will work closely with local authorities and other stakeholders to ensure that it provides the guidance which is relevant and useful to them.'

Existing Measures in Wales

The proposed new 'Clean Air Zone Framework' will build on an assortment of measures already implemented in Wales including real time monitoring and reporting on air quality.

These measures are largely executed by local authorities through a system of '[Local Air Quality Management](#)' (LAQM). LAQM is supported by Welsh Government-issued guidance documents which provide information all aspects of LAQM including pollutant concentration targets and action plan formulation.

These are underpinned by the legislated air quality objectives in Air Quality (Wales) Regulations 2000, Amendment Regulations 2002 and [Air Quality Standards \(Wales\) Regulations 2010](#) which are largely designed around EU air quality objectives.

In order to meet these objectives, local authorities have deployed monitoring sites across Wales to record changes in air quality. All 22 local authorities are members of the [Welsh Air Quality Forum \(WAQF\)](#) and report their air quality information to be compiled by the WAQF. The forum also offers advice and expertise to help local authorities meet their pollution targets.



2016 Air Quality Consultation

Last year, the Welsh Government held a [consultation on local air quality](#) and proposed several measures to streamline the LAQM process, including more frequent reporting on air pollution levels and encouraging collaboration between local authorities to enhance efficiency.

A key part of this consultation was a discussion on '[Air Quality Management Areas](#)' (AQMA). These are designated areas where the national air quality standard is not met. In these areas, local authorities must [undertake special measures](#) to monitor and manage the pollution problem. This is done with advice and regulation from [Natural Resources Wales](#). The consultation recommended that authorities be able to declare an AQMA more easily so that measures can be implemented promptly and effectively.

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