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Aelod Senedd Cymru dros Aberconwy
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Re.: Clean Air Day & Regulation Timeframes

Dear First Minister,

I should like to begin this letter by marking Clean Air Day 2021. Poor air quality has become a true modern menace for our society, contributing to a reduced life expectancy, tallying an equivalent of between 1,000 and 1,400 mortalities in Wales each year, and costing the Welsh NHS approximately £1 billion each year. For this reason, it is heartening to see a cross-party consensus on the need for urgent action to address this public health concern. However, and further to my questions to you earlier this week, I must raise concerns about the White Paper.

Firstly, whilst your Programme of Government has committed to passing a Clean Air Act, consistent with World Health Organisation guidance, still no date has been given for when the Bill will be laid in the Senedd and I also note that it could take up to two years after the Bill receives royal assent for new regulations to be set. Indeed, according to your consultation this year, we may not see new regulations set until Spring 2024. This timeline fails to recognise the seriousness of the issue across Wales. So, will you confirm that this regulatory time frame will be reviewed so that actions are taken and commitments met?

Last week, I welcomed a new study from the Health Protection Division at Public Health Wales, in collaboration with colleagues from Public Health England, which found that prioritising access to active travel and public transport will be important steps in any plan to reduce car journeys and exposure to air pollution for all. By your own admission in the consultation, there is a need to explore policy and funding options following a comprehensive review of the LAQM framework to complement the legislative changes proposed. Therefore, will you review the findings of this study and look to implement its recommendations, including separating any future cycle routes from motorised traffic, to help boost active travel and public transport usage?

Finally, and during FMQs on Tuesday, I was most disappointed by your lack of an answer to my pressing questions on the real-terms funding cut to clean air action that has been witnessed during this financial year. The £3.4 million revenue funding and £17 million capital funding, allocated for air quality action in 2021-22, represents a real-terms cut from the previous year. So, I also write to again ask whether you will look to undo this cut and commit to invest further in tackling the world's largest single environmental health risk?

I look forward to receiving your reply to these most pertinent of questions.

Yours sincerely,

Janet Finch-Saunders MS/AS