

£9 million fund for local authorities to tackle air pollution

Local projects to improve air quality across England will get a £7 million funding boost this year, the government confirmed today, as applications opened for this year's scheme.

The government's [Air Quality Grant](#) helps councils develop and implement measures to benefit schools, businesses and communities and reduce the impact of polluted air on people's health.

At least £1 million of the £9 million available this year will be dedicated to projects to improve public awareness in local communities about the risks of air pollution, following a recommendation in the Coroner's Prevention of Future Deaths report after the tragic death of Ella Kissi-Debrah in 2013.

These could include projects to inform people about the ways to reduce their exposure to emissions by avoiding pollution hotspots. Projects that deal with improving air quality, as well as improving knowledge about the health risks, are also strongly encouraged to apply.

Local authorities can also bid for a portion of the fund for a wide range of other projects to improve air quality and create cleaner and healthier environments. The criteria for this year's grant period will prioritise three areas:

- Projects which reduce air pollutant exceedances, especially in those areas that are projected to remain in exceedance of the UK's legal targets;
- Projects that will improve knowledge and information about air quality and steps individuals can take to reduce their exposure to air pollution; and
- Projects that include measures to deal with particulate matter, which is the pollutant most harmful to human health.

Since it was established, the Air Quality Grant scheme has awarded almost £70 million to a variety of projects, including a digital education package to teach children and parents about the health impacts of particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide, the development of a community website to share air quality information and raise awareness with local residents and visitors, and a project to highlight the air quality issues that surround domestic burning.

Other applicants in previous years have also been awarded funding for projects including training GPs as Air Quality Champions to deliver air quality improvement messages in their surgeries, and monitoring PM2.5 levels at schools.

The Westminster Cross River Partnership received £573,370 from the 2019 fund alongside £160,000 match funding from Business Improvement Districts and

local authorities to develop initiatives to improve air quality across London.

The partnership, led by Westminster City Council in collaboration with 16 project partners, has engaged with businesses through the Clean Air Villages project to develop local initiatives to support organisations in reducing their emissions from deliveries and servicing trips. This includes nine cargo bike schemes, replacing car and van deliveries with cycle freight; a citizen scientist air quality monitoring project to help provide information about local air quality and an air quality ambassador programme.

This project and others funded by the grant scheme have contributed to the significant improvement in air quality seen in the UK in recent decades. Since 2010, levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) – particles or liquid droplets in the air which present the greatest risk to public health – have reduced by 11% while emissions of nitrogen oxides have fallen by 32% and are at their lowest level since records began.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

“Air quality has improved significantly since 2010 but still poses enormous health risks, which is why we are boosting our funding to local authorities to help them take action.

“This is part of the Government’s wider strategy to tackle air quality. Our landmark Environment Bill places a duty on us to set at least two air quality targets by October 2022, including an ambitious, legally-binding target to reduce fine particulate matter – the most damaging pollutant to human health.

“We know local authorities are best placed to address the issues they face in their areas. We look forward to receiving innovative ideas for ways to reduce emissions, help communities understand how they can limit their exposure to air pollution, and promote cleaner, greener alternatives.”

Transport Minister Rachel Maclean said:

“From schools to local businesses, the Air Quality Grant will help local councils implement measures to clean up our air as we build back greener, reduce our carbon footprint and look ahead to COP26. These could include projects to help businesses make the switch to greener transport, or help local authorities better monitor pollution from roads.

“The funding announced today will help us improve air quality, meet our climate change obligations, and support economic growth right across the country.”

Kate Fenton, who led the Clean Air Villages project funded by the Air Quality Grant, said:

“Defra’s Air Quality Grant has enabled Cross River Partnership to bring together its members from the public and private sector, to deliver both tailored local initiatives and cross-borough schemes that improve air quality in London and beyond.

“The recently launched Clean Air Tool supports businesses and individuals who are considering switching from diesel vehicles to zero or ultra-low emission options to understand the impact of their choices. The latest phase of the Clean Air Villages project to be funded by the grant, and led by Westminster City Council, provides the opportunity to continue promoting and launching cargo bike and shared electric vehicle schemes.

“There are also a wide range of freight interventions being delivered, some of which are to support businesses in understanding the impact of the expansion of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone on their business. Through working together, we can improve the air that we all breathe.”

Applications for the grant open from Friday 3 September and close on Friday 8 October.

The Air Quality Grant forms part of the wider [UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations](#), which includes a £3.5 billion investment into air quality and cleaner transport. The plan is supporting the uptake of low emissions vehicles, getting more people to cycle and walk, and encouraging cleaner public transport.

It also contributes towards meeting the objectives of Defra’s 2019 Clean Air Strategy, which has been praised by the World Health Organisation as “an example for the rest of the world to follow”.

The government has also recently taken bold action to cut pollution from household burning – the single largest source of the pollutant particulate matter (PM2.5), which is the most harmful air pollutant for human health. A ban on the sale of coal and wet wood for domestic burning came into force in May this year.

Local Authorities in England are invited to apply via Bravo. Further details on how to apply are available on the [Air Quality Grants GOV.UK page](#).