

**From the Head of Air and Environmental Quality**  
Amy Holmes



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

Ms. S. Toland  
Director of City and Neighbourhood Services  
Belfast City Council

By email via [steelesara@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:steelesara@belfastcity.gov.uk)

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30<sup>th</sup> August 2023

Dear Ms. S. Toland,

Thank you for your recent correspondence dated 8<sup>th</sup> August on behalf of Belfast City Council following the People and Communities Committee meeting and ratification of the Detailed Assessment report by Council.

It is positive and across the Department we very much welcome that Councillors acknowledged the valuable air quality assessment work and the additional ambient monitoring that has been undertaken as components of the Detailed Assessment. I personally recognise the considerable work that Alistair and the team in the council have put into this project and am very grateful for this.

The Air and Environmental Quality (AEQ) Unit has considered the Council's request for funding support for a dedicated ambient air quality monitoring programme to be implemented outside of schools as part of the councils 2023/24 LAQM Grant application. We fully recognise the importance of monitoring, and indeed this is reflected in our revised priorities for the new grant, detailed in Annex A of my letter to the Councils dated February this year (please see attached). You will have noted the increased rates of funding available for some aspects of the grant which have been determined in an effort to assist all councils as much as possible, at this time of both financial and funding pressures. The priorities for this year's grant as set out in my letter are:

1. Maintenance of existing monitoring;
2. Staff costs;
3. Expansion of monitoring; and
4. Behavioural change/education campaigns.

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For the last five years the total of the LAQM Grant budget has been fairly consistent and in the region of £188-256,000 with Belfast City Council being a major recipient of this grant as compared to the other 10 councils. I can confirm that the funds that the Council received for the Detailed Assessment, which were considerable, were both additional and necessitated a separate financial bid by the AEQ team.

We have noticed an increase in staff costs and the cost of gasses in applications, this year, and there are a number of councils which are expanding/increasing monitoring. Despite obtaining a considerable increase in budget for the LAQM Grant this year, it has not been possible to fund all requests from all councils in our initial Letters of Offer. While I appreciate that this may come as a disappointment to the Council, I would like to reassure you that the team is fully committed to protecting human health and the environment and we monitor spend very closely to ensure maximum benefit for air quality and value for money for the public purse. On occasion, additional funds can become available mid-year and additional bids can be made in-year, and in the event of this occurring, the team will look very closely at the options for how this money can best be passed on to the councils via the LAQM Grant.

Within the Department I have submitted proposals for additional funding for the next two years and will be bidding for a further and considerable uplift in funds next year. It would be helpful if, the Council could, when submitting an LAQM Grant application for 2024/25, provide detailed proposals on the monitoring programme to be implemented outside of schools. My colleagues can outline the information that would be required in a follow up email, if this would be helpful? The team would also be very happy to meet to discuss any programmes in advance of an application made next year.

Despite being unable to fund all the council's requests, I trust the Council will find the funding assistance we have offered this year to be helpful. We have offered all of the £4,050.00 requested funding for, "Schools 'idling vehicle' air pollution monitoring, and awareness raising project. Purchase of 2 no. additional Zephyr small sensor air quality monitors." Having further reviewed the Council's application we have also been able to offer £72,496.98 of the £77,443.44 that was requested, an offer of almost 94%.

It may be helpful for you to consider that the Department of Infrastructure are required under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, to develop sectoral plans for transport which set a minimum spend on active travel from the overall transport budgets of 10%. DfI can advise further and have a central email point of contact for queries of this nature:

[ClimateChangeStrategies@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](mailto:ClimateChangeStrategies@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk). You may wish to consider development of a pilot programme which involves active travel at the school, and incorporates air quality monitoring 'before', 'during' and 'after' the pilot.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Council Officers for their support as well as their diligent and ongoing work to tackle air pollution.

I hope that the funding offered this year, in particular for the Schools 'idling vehicle' air pollution monitoring, and awareness raising project, will go some way to help obtain a better understanding of ambient air quality in the vicinity of schools and to assess the beneficial impacts of mitigation measures.

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We look forward to working with you further next year regarding this project.

Yours sincerely

Amy Holmes  
Head of Air and Environmental Quality



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