# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Local Authority Plans to Address Nitrogen Dioxide Exceedances** |
| **DATE** | **2 August 2019** |
| **BY** | **Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs** |

I welcome the plans of Caerphilly County Borough Council and Cardiff Council to address nitrogen dioxide exceedances in their areas. This is a crucial step in addressing levels of air pollution in Wales.

As a result of non-compliance with Directive 2008/50/EC on Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe, the former Minister for Environment signed a legal Direction in February 2018 requiring Caerphilly County Borough Council and Cardiff Council to undertake feasibility studies to identify measures to address exceedances of nitrogen dioxide limit values in their areas in the soonest time possible.

Both Authorities submitted their final plans on 28 June, in accordance with the Direction. I commend the Authorities for meeting the challenging timescales in delivering their final plans. An independent expert review panel has convened to assess the final plans and has provided advice to ensure the plans are based on sound evidence and are likely to achieve compliance with legal limits in the soonest possible time.

Cardiff Council has proposed a package of measures comprising retrofitting of emissions abatement technology to buses, taxi mitigation measures, and city centre transport and active travel measures.

Ministers accepted Cardiff Council’s plan on 31 July with a number of caveats. The Authority must refine the case for their preferred option which must be focused on achieving the legal requirement and must demonstrate why any additional complementary measures are essential to ensure compliance with the legal limits along Castle Street. The Authority must also undertake further modelling to better assess the potential of a charging Clean Air Zone to achieve limit values. Cardiff Council have up to 3 months to undertake additional work to improve their final plan and present robust evidence their identified package of measures is the route most likely to achieve compliance in the soonest time possible.

Caerphilly Council Borough Council has identified the demolition of 23 dwellings at Woodside Terrace, Hafodyrynys as the option most likely to reduce nitrogen dioxide levels to below legal limits in the soonest time possible.

Ministers have been unable to accept Caerphilly County Borough Council’s final plan in its current form. We could not take the view the Authority’s plan has fully met the requirements of the Direction issued in 2018 as there is insufficient confidence the preferred option could achieve the legal requirement. However, the assessment completed to date of the demolition of dwellings shows this to be the most likely option to achieve the legal requirement and reduce public exposure in the soonest possible time. I have directed the Authority to proceed with this measure whilst undertaking further assessment to improve confidence limit values are likely to be achieved.

I have signed new legal Directions to Caerphilly County Borough Council and Cardiff Council entitled ‘Environment Act 1995 (Feasibility Study for Nitrogen Dioxide Compliance) Air Quality Direction 2019’. These Directions require both Authorities to undertake further specific activities to improve their plans and make stronger cases for their preferred options.

Given the urgent need to address the nitrogen dioxide exceedances on Hafodyrynys and Castle Street, work will now begin in both Authorities. The Welsh Government has established a £20m Clean Air Fund which allows the Local Authorities to bid for money to support the implementation of measures to improve air quality. We will meet the costs of agreed measures, including the costs of the further assessment required.

The Welsh Government is committed to improving air quality in Wales, but it is clear we face significant challenges in doing so. It is of the utmost importance we take action to reduce nitrogen dioxide levels to below legal limits in the soonest time possible to protect public health and the natural environment.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this following recess I would be happy to do so.