

Earlier this year, local authorities were allotted funding to improve air quality. If you were to be allocated funding, what key initiatives would you pursue to improve air quality in your local area?

Prioritising initiatives that align with regional-specific air quality challenges is essential for local authorities to enhance air quality. The following recommendations have been tailored for the London Borough of Camden, in which I reside. I believe targeting these key recommendations with available funding¹ will lead to tangible improvements in air quality across the borough.

Stakeholder and community engagement

Firstly, stakeholder and community engagement events, including street fairs, community workshops, and public awareness projects, could enhance public awareness of air pollution and provide a platform for the community to voice their concerns. This feedback helps the council better understand specific air quality issues with local knowledge and prioritise actions based on community needs and expectations.

Moreover, sharing air quality knowledge during these events empowers the public with measures to proactively mitigate potential impacts. This is particularly beneficial for marginalised and vulnerable communities, who bear a disproportionate burden of poor air quality. As Camden has established a real-time hyper-local air quality network with Airscape², community events enable the public to interpret the data and integrate it into their daily decision-making processes.

Community engagement fosters collaborative solutions by enabling local authorities to develop effective air quality strategies with the community. This boosts public support for policies and regulations, increases compliance, enhances a sense of ownership, and ensures the long-term sustainability of initiatives.

Improve active mobility

Road traffic accounts for around 50% of nitrogen oxides and particulate matter emissions within Camden³. Active travel could produce numerous cross-benefits including decreased road traffic, reduced carbon emissions, improved public health, prospered local economy, and enhanced social cohesion. Several cost-efficient actions could be undertaken to improve active mobility, such as:

Safe routes programs

Elevated pollution levels are observed during peak hours in northern Camden due to school-related traffic³. The council could identify, design, and publicise safer routes around schools and promote active commuting. This will reduce traffic and exposure of children, a highly sensitive demographic, to pollution and enhance safety for all road users.

¹ Defra. (2023). £10.7 million in funding for local authorities to improve air quality.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/107-million-in-funding-for-local-authorities-to-improve-air-quality>

² Airscape. https://airscape.ai/map/GB_CMD?l=@51.5419854,-0.1600000,12.00&p=AQI&v=now. Retrieved 6th Sep 2023

³ Camden Council. (2023). Camden Clean Air Strategy 2019-2034.

[https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/0/Camden+Clean+Air+Action+Plan+2023-](https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/0/Camden+Clean+Air+Action+Plan+2023-2026_Final_2022.12.19+%282%29.pdf/ad618e94-0113-696d-5fc6-104d8969ab5a?t=1671619123044)

[2026_Final_2022.12.19+%282%29.pdf/ad618e94-0113-696d-5fc6-104d8969ab5a?t=1671619123044](https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/0/Camden+Clean+Air+Action+Plan+2023-2026_Final_2022.12.19+%282%29.pdf/ad618e94-0113-696d-5fc6-104d8969ab5a?t=1671619123044)

Multi-model transit integration

Expanding bike parking at transit stations (e.g., Kings Cross, West Hampstead, Swiss Cottage) and promoting borough-wide bike-sharing, including electric and cargo bikes, could encourage multi-modal commuting, reduce traffic, increase accessibility of cycling, especially in hilly areas where some people may be dissuaded from cycling due to steep gradients.

Redesigning road space

Converting underutilised vehicle lanes into bike lanes or widening pavements, along with repurposing on-street parking spaces into parklets, enhances road safety and creates inviting public spaces for pedestrians and cyclists. These initiatives also promote community engagement and outdoor activities, strengthening the sense of community in urban areas.

Cross-regional collaboration

Given the cross-regional impacts of air pollution and challenges in holding polluting activities outside the borough accountable, it is recommended to undertake collaborative measures in partnership with neighbouring authorities. This can be achieved by establishing dedicated workgroups with other councils. The workgroup will collect, review, and respond to nuances relevant to air quality, implementing joint measures, and engaging with broader communities to address cross-regional air pollution issues, ultimately improving overall air quality.

Sharing lessons with other councils is also essential as it prevents the repetition of mistakes, informs evidence-based decision-making, and promotes innovation. Additionally, involving stakeholders and local communities in these sharing sessions ensures that community needs are accurately reflected. Furthermore, by drawing insights from past experiences, policymakers can allocate resources more efficiently, targeting measures with a higher likelihood of success and avoiding costly endeavours with a history of failure.

In summary, while the exact measures may vary based on the size of funding, pursuing the three initiatives outlined above will yield holistic, cost-effective, and sustainable strategies to improve air quality, whilst co-benefiting other environmental and social issues in Camden simultaneously.