



Mayor of Bristol

Dr Thérèse Coffey MP

Under Secretary of State for the Environment
Department for Environment and Rural Affairs
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Reply to
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Date

Marvin Rees
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21 February 2019

Dear Minister

Thank you for your letter of 16 January 2019.

Firstly, let me make it clear, I am committed to improving Bristol's air quality and am already taking significant steps to do so.

I was extremely disappointed that you chose to give your comments to the press when there was an opportunity for constructive dialogue between us. Had you spoken with me or even communicated privately, you would have learned just how much we are actually doing and the complexities we are overcoming to work towards cleaner air for the citizens of this city.

I am pleased that we have now been able to arrange a direct conversation between us next week. However, I was under the impression that my officers and your Joint Air Quality Unit had been in far closer liaison than I have since learnt is the case and perhaps that contributed to your approach.

Since your last email, my senior team had a constructive meeting with JAQU senior officials and we have made progress. In addition to our existing work, we are also now pursuing some of the additional suggestions your team made that will help us to optimise our approach.

The timeline for submitting our Outline Business Case (OBC) by 21 February has regrettably not been met and this is unavoidable. The key reason for this is that the initial modelling, that we hoped would form the basis of the OBC and consultation and was proceeding on time has resulted in unacceptable outcomes as the Distributional and Equalities Assessment within the Economic Case states these options would produce significant adverse impacts on low income groups, compounding the challenges we face tackling equality and economic exclusion. We also received warnings that the measures could undermine our economic strength. This at a time when we face significant uncertainties and need to build economic resilience for the sake of Bristol and the country.

An Equality Impact Assessment will also be needed to assess whether there would be any disproportionate impacts on groups with protected characteristics. I do not believe it is acceptable for us to proceed with these options in the light of the impact on the poorest people in the city and so further assessment has to be carried out. I would be surprised if you were of the view that I should proceed with a plan that is clearly flawed and explicitly impacts on low income groups and undermines the economy, to meet a deadline that will have no impact on the time we meet compliance.

We are therefore urgently reviewing our approach. It is already apparent that previously, options were wrongly dismissed that prioritised action on buses, taxis and HGV. Whilst they aren't necessarily the most polluting vehicles, collectively they present an opportunity for significant emissions reductions. Alongside this, we are considering some of the other interventions in the long-list. We have revisited our initial modelling that suggests an approach based on targeting these classes of vehicles could reach compliance at least at the same time as options already modelled. This needs greater consideration, but with further development of the variant option, including some of the ideas we discussed with your team, including financial support for retro-fits and a city wide scrappage scheme, it may be possible to accelerate to get to compliance sooner.

My team has already sent the baseline and validation reports and are working towards ensuring we have a robust baseline position. Work that is now taking place is ensuring all the projects and programmes we are already delivering are captured in the baseline. This includes working with First Group on a bus deal to double bus journeys to work and a move to a full fleet of bio-fuel buses, along with significant plans for local cycling and walking infrastructure and no-idle-zones.

We have now reviewed the project plan but without a preferred option on the table we are unable to confirm a proposed programme at the moment. This is something we would like to work with you and your team closely on, so that we can agree a project and programme to take forward as a priority, including resourcing and how we deal with public consultation.

It is important to note that despite the short delay in the business case, the revised approach will not result in any delay in reaching compliance. It will produce an approach that is more likely to be successful, will help us build the inclusive economy we need, and strengthen our economy.

If you have any queries about the approach we are taking, or any of the reports we have shared with JAQU, let me know. My senior team have now diarised regular catch-up calls with JAQU.

I am of course, happy to further discuss the timetable for the submission of the plan and I look forward to our discussion on Monday. You can be sure that I am committed to improving air quality for the citizens of Bristol and we will reach compliance as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marvin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Marvin Rees
Mayor of Bristol