

Air Quality, Food and Housing Standards

CIEH Budget 2018 Parliamentary Briefing



Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)

CIEH is a charity and professional membership body for Environmental Health Practitioners.

We have a heritage of more than 130 years and our purpose is to help our members, and the wider profession, achieve the objective of enabling safer, cleaner and healthier environments for the benefit of people, businesses and local communities.

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Overview

This budget is an opportunity for the Chancellor to show that he is serious about tackling some of the vital issues around environmental and public health in the United Kingdom.

The key issues of growing concern are the deteriorating state of air quality in our cities, the need to maintain and build on food standards after Brexit and the imperative to address housing standards.

Air Quality

There is no doubt that the UK is standing on the edge of a public health emergency when it comes to air quality. Earlier this month, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights and the environment stated that the UK is endangering people's health by denying their right to clean air.

Now really is the time for the Government to take this issue seriously.

Key points

- The health implications of poor air quality are severe. According to the Government's own figures, poor air quality is resulting in excess of 40,000 additional deaths per annum. It is also associated with coronary heart disease, respiratory illness, dementia and cancer. The young, the old and those with pre-existing respiratory illness are particularly affected.

- Emissions associated with traffic are the major problem – especially from diesel cars.
- Environmental Health professionals monitor environmental air quality and have responsibility for delivering interventions around local air quality management.
- The current legal framework is outdated and does not allow Environmental Health professionals to effectively deal with issues such as air quality deterioration.

What needs to happen

In order for the Government to begin to address the growing crisis that is the UK's air quality, we are calling on the Chancellor to:

- Commit to improving air quality across the board, taking central responsibility for action.
- Throw government support behind a new Clean Air Act that is fit for the future and which creates a comprehensive and contemporary framework for delivering improvements.
- Provide appropriate funding to encourage active and sustainable transport such as walking and cycling.
- Provide appropriate funding to enable local authorities to begin delivering the Government's new air quality strategy.
- Commit the Government to delivering a better charging point infrastructure to encourage electric vehicle uptake.

Food Safety and Standards

There is currently a lot of uncertainty around the UK's food supply and food standards, resulting from Brexit, as well as the absence of a clear outline of our future trading relationships.

Key points

- There is a very real uncertainty regarding Britain's ability to feed itself after Brexit, as highlighted by CIEH and the Food Research Collaboration's report, Feeding Britain, which can be viewed and downloaded here: <http://foodresearch.org.uk/publications/feeding-britain-food-security-after-brexit/>
- So far, the Government has failed to give proper consideration to Food after Brexit.
- There are clearly insufficient resources to deliver the appropriate veterinary or Environmental Health oversight in respect of the import/export of food products of animal origin.
- The Food Standards Agency is currently working to completely rework the food regulatory regime in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This is being further complicated by the uncertainty around Brexit and our trade negotiations.
- The Food Standards Agency and local authority resources have undergone notable reductions in investment; meaning the UK is trying to deliver our international, national, and local food safety and standards responsibilities on a shoe-string.

What needs to happen

We are calling on the Chancellor to:

- Demonstrate that the Government is giving serious consideration to the UK's food supply and standards following Brexit.
- Firmly commit the Government to not lowering the UK's food or environmental standards as the result of any future trade agreement following Brexit.
- Provide the necessary resources to enable local Environmental Health professionals and Official Veterinarians to deliver proper and appropriate food inspection and certification services.
- Support local authorities to provide sufficient environmental health resources so that they are able to meet their food safety and standards responsibilities going forward.

Housing Standards

The Budget is also an opportunity for the Government to look at some of the key issues around housing, most notably standards and cold homes.

Key points

- The quality of housing is closely linked to the health and wellbeing of those who live in it. Poor quality housing costs the NHS around £1.4bn, and wider society around £18bn, per year. Cold homes have one of the most tangible and immediate impacts on the health and wellbeing of their occupiers.

- The level of excess winter deaths is 28% higher in the UK than in Sweden, where energy prices are higher and winters longer and more severe.
- In 2014, the number of households in fuel poverty in England was estimated to be at 2.38 million, representing approximately 11% of all English households. This has increased to 2.55m in 2016.
- The Minimum Energy Efficiency Regulations 2018 were introduced to improve energy efficiency in the private rented sector and to remove the barriers for action which exist in the private rented sector. However, due to a 'no cost' exemption for landlords and tenants being written into the Regulations, these new minimum standards are not working in practice.
- A consultation earlier this year looked at how these Regulations could be made more effective and a cost-cap for landlords was proposed. However, a £2,500 cost cap would only work to bring 30% of the Band F and Band G properties up to a Band E. The other 70% - around 225,000 homes - would remain in the worst two energy efficiency bands.

What needs to happen

We are calling on the Chancellor to:

- Approve a higher cost threshold of £5,000 for Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard for privately rented properties in England and Wales so that these Regulations can work effectively at raising housing standards.
- Extend Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards to Homes in Multiple Occupation, which are often occupied by the most vulnerable people in society.

How You Can Help

We believe that it is imperative that the Chancellor looks to address these issues as a priority. As such, we are calling on MPs and Peers to raise these concerns in the Budget debates, and with the Chancellor directly.

We would be very happy to draft any content, or provide further information, to support your parliamentary activities around air quality, food standards and housing, so please do let us know.