# Terms of Reference – Air Quality Information System Review Steering Group

## Purpose of Group

The purpose of the Air Quality Information System Review Steering Group will be to provide direction and oversight for a programme of work considering the effectiveness of the current air quality information system and to recommend possible updates to the Daily Air Quality Index (DAQI) and broader air quality messaging channels.

This review will look at the air quality information system in its entirety, considering how information is delivered as well as messaging content.

The role of the steering group will be to advise on the scope of work needed to assess how an effective air quality information system can best function and what changes are needed to the current system.

The group will meet every two months for a period of two years.

During the two-year period, the steering group will provide suggestions for a programme of work to address gaps in current understanding.

Throughout the review period, as new evidence emerges, the group will be expected to make clear, actionable recommendations on the changes (if any) which should be made to the present information system to better meet the needs of individuals, healthcare professionals, government bodies and other key users.

**Background**

The UK air quality information system includes the DAQI, which alerts the public and at-risk groups about short-term changes in levels of air quality and provides accompanying health advice. Alongside the DAQI a number of air quality related websites and messaging services are used to disseminate information and issue alerts – see document AQIS-2021-04 for further information.

The Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) exists to provide independent advice to government departments regarding the health impacts of air pollution. Historically this group has made recommendations for updates and additions to the DAQI. The last major overhaul of the (now) DAQI followed COMEAPs 2011 Review of the UK Air Quality Index.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and UK Health Security Agency (UK HSA) along with the chairs of the Air Quality Expert Group (AQEG) and COMEAP have agreed that there is a pressing need to review the current provision of UK air quality information, including the DAQI, as well as for a review of the links to wider messaging.

The pressing need for this review has been emphasised by the inquest into the death of Ella Adoo Kissi-Debrah. The coroner’s report – The Prevention of Future Deaths (April 2021) outlined the following matters of concern pertaining to the communication of air pollution episodes:

* There is a low public awareness of the sources of information about national and local pollution levels.
* The adverse effects of air pollution on health are not being sufficiently communicated to patients and their carers by medical and nursing professionals.

In response to the Prevention of Future Deaths report Defra, UK HSA (previously Public Health England) and DHSC made the following commitments relevant to this review:

* Defra, Public Health England and DHSC to pull together an expert group to steer the overhaul and update the DAQI in the light of accumulated new evidence and experience
* Defra will continue to engage with broadcasters, local radio stations, social media companies, and other media outlets, to look at ways to improve communication on air quality.

## Remit of the Group

The group will consider the nature, penetration, and impact of an air quality information system that seeks to reduce people’s exposure to air pollution and to minimise their role contributing to the problem.

It will:

* Consider the work needed to ensure the UK’s system for warning and providing advice to the public and at-risk groups on air pollution reflects the latest evidence and understanding of:
	+ The range of and levels at which air pollutants impact human health (with potential impact on DAQI threshold levels)
	+ The resulting actions that the general public and at-risk groups could/should take to protect their health, including any differentiated advice for different groups
	+ Actions that could / should be taken by the general public and/or other sectors to lessen the extent and severity of particular episodes
	+ The likely response to messages aimed at proving effective/ actionable advice to different groups (and how to develop impactful messages for the groups identified) with consideration of the risk of unintended consequences.
	+ The system(s) by which advice could be most effectively communicated to the public (and at-risk groups)
* Provide recommendations for a cohesive programme of work to address gaps in current understanding on the above
* Provide recommendations for a cohesive programme of work to address other relevant evidence gap, including, but not limited to understanding sources and contributions to air pollution and air pollution episodes and what steps should be taken to reduce these
* Fulfil a role in steering and/or advising on the delivery of projects relevant to members’ expertise. Note, that the steering group will not have direct responsibility for carrying out and/or commissioning these projects
* Provide a view of whether the existing system of alerts and advice could be improved
* If relevant, recommend approach(es) to providing information and advice that will most effectively reduce harm
* Advise on the realistic impact that improvements to the air quality information system could have and determine what measures of success should be for any future evaluation of the system

The group should acknowledge that new and emergent evidence might lead work programmes in a direction divergent from the above and should operate in a way that is reactive to developments.

The review concerns the whole UK Air Quality Information System and may need to considerer differing local contexts, different local information needs and data quality and availability in different areas.

Air Quality policy is devolved; however it is expected that the Steering Group will engage with representatives from the Devolved Administrations at various points throughout the review process.

The outcome from this body of work should be clear, actionable recommendations on the changes which should be made to the present system, if any. These should be provided in a timely and considered way based on emerging evidence.

Updates from the group including any findings from commissioned work and recommendations should be regularly communicated to relevant stakeholders.

## Membership

The group will be chaired by Bill Parish – Deputy Director, Air Quality and Industrial Emissions (Defra).

The steering group will include representation from the Central Government Departments and agencies with the greatest responsibility for and/or most interest in alerting the public about poor air quality. It will be multi-disciplinary, including independent experts in air quality science; the health impacts of air pollution; the treatment of relevant conditions; health inequalities; behavioural science; and communications, including digital capabilities. It will also include representation from members of the public and those vulnerable to the effects of poor air quality.

A significant element of each member’s role will involve building and maintaining a network of wider stakeholders from within steering group members’ field of expertise. This network will act as a specialised advisory group, and steering group members will feed in the views of the advisory group to meetings as and when required. Please see document AQIS-2021-03 for a visual representation of the anticipated structure.

Generally, individuals should have sufficient expertise and be in a position, where relevant, to draw upon/drive forward areas of work with new or existing working groups within their organisation and/or field of expertise.

Further expertise can be co-opted into to group at relevant points.

The following individuals and organisations will sit on the steering group as members:

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| --- | --- |
| **Organisation / Individual** | **Expertise** |
| Chair – Bill Parish  |  |
| AQEG – Ally Lewis | AQ science / atmospheric chemistry; thresholds; |
| COMEAP – Anna Hansell | AQ impact on human health; AQ and respiratory disease |
| Medical Profession | AQ impact on human health |
| Representative for Vulnerable Groups | Lived experience |
| Lay Person | Lived experience; user experience |
| Behavioural Science  | Messaging; Behavioural Insights; |
| Government Comms | Marketing and campaigns; experience of systems for communicating official information (e.g., flood alerts) |
| Local Government | Engagement with diversity of local interests/needs; community engagement; relationship with devolved administrations  |
| Digital Communications | Digital design and user interface |
| Central Government | Coordination, policy and implementation  |

**Time Commitment**

Members should commit to sitting on the steering group for a minimum of two years starting autumn/winter 2021.

Meetings will be held every other month.

Outside of meetings, members may sometimes be asked to review papers and provide input via correspondence.

On occasion, members may be required to draft short papers or research propositions ahead of meetings.

There will also be a small-time commitment involved in engaging with the wider advisory group.

The overall time commitment is expected to be no more than 1–2 days per month (and not exceeding 15 days in a year, including attendance at meetings)

**Reporting Timeline**

The group will be expected to make interim recommendations based on the work being carried out in order to inform the programme of research and development.

Final recommendations are due 24 months from the first meeting.

## Operating Procedures

The group will operate in accordance with the Principles of Public Life[[1]](#footnote-2).

There will be 6 meetings per year. These are expected to be attended in person or online, with secretariat support provided by UK HSA and Defra.

Papers will be circulated no later than 7-10 working days prior to meetings.

The steering group should note that to facilitate effective discussion, papers may be shared with members that are not in the public domain.

Documentation shared with the steering group should be treated in confidence and not shared further without seeking agreement.

## Outputs

Summary minutes will be produced and will be available from the group’s secretariat on request.

Work undertaken under the guidance of the group will be presented to ministers where relevant, shared with stakeholders and published on UK-AIR and/ or Defra search science as appropriate.

## Central Government Responsibilities:

Defra, UK HSA and DHSC will, as far as possible, aim to ensure:

1. Reasonable resource is available to undertake work recommended by the steering group
2. That the steering group is updated and consulted on progress
3. The findings of the work undertaken as part of the review are integrated in the development of products and services.

## Duration

The group will be convened to provide recommendations 24 months from the first meeting.

It is expected that the group will then advise on the implementation of the recommendations, but timelines will be reviewed at this stage alongside the continued role of the group.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)