

**Date:** 21 December 2023

**Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Monday 20th November 2023**

Dear Sir / Madam,

I have recently forwarded to you a copy of the agenda for the next meeting of the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

I am now able to enclose a copy of the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was circulated.

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3. **Health impacts of Walleys Quarry Landfill Site, Silverdale** (Pages 3 - 10)

To consider matters relating to Walley's Quarry Landfill Site with a focus on health implications for residents.

John Tradewell  
Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services





The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP,  
Secretary of State for Environment,  
Food and Rural Affairs

Date: 07 November 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

Staffordshire County Council's Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee has scheduled to meet on 20 November 2023 to consider the health impacts of Walleys Quarry Landfill Site, Silverdale, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, on local residents in view of the announcement in October that the environmental monitors have been mis-calibrated and that data collected since 2017 is flawed.

The Committee has requested that the Environment Agency attend in person the meeting to address:

- What has happened in respect of the environmental monitors?
- Do we now have access to reliable data about emissions from the site – and what is this data showing?
- Can the historic data be retrospectively recalculated to reliably calculate the cumulative exposure of local residents to hydrogen sulphide and other pollutants, given the exposure has been significantly greater than was originally indicated?

The Environment Agency has declined our invitation to attend the County's statutory Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny committee to share what it knows and answer questions in a publicly available and transparent way, so that we can use that information to inform the Health Security Agency to determine the health impacts, and so that Staffordshire residents can assess the impact on their physical and mental health.

The County's Health Committee is disappointed that a publicly funded body is not willing to attend our meeting to allow this committee to openly scrutinise the issue in a meaningful and appropriate way. The prospect for our committee to not be able to ask questions relating to our specific concerns undermines

many of the principles we all operate to in public life and I am sure is not something that can be condoned.

I would ask that the Environment Agency is requested at the highest level to engage with Staffordshire County Council's Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny committee and play an active part in an open and transparent way to provide the answers that we and our residents want. To do otherwise looks like a deliberate attempt to evade scrutiny and transparency and does little for public confidence or accountability.

I would ask that you remind the Environment Agency of its public role and ask that you urge them to reconsider attendance at the County's forthcoming meeting on 20 November 2023, as to host a health meeting in public where a publicly funded agency does not attend will only undermine some of the good work that is going on to control hydrogen sulphide gas emissions coming from the site.

I am grateful for your due consideration and support with the above.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Jeremy Pert**  
**Staffordshire Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee –**  
**Chair**  
***on behalf of the***

**Staffordshire Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

CC Member of Parliament – Aaron Bell MP  
Chief Executive, Environment Agency  
Chief Executive, Newcastle Borough Council & SCG lead



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Rebecca Pow MP  
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Our ref: PO2023/21870/MP

9 November 2023

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you for your letter of 7 November to the Secretary of State about the health impacts of Walleys Quarry Landfill Site. I am replying as the Minister responsible for environmental quality.

Staffordshire County Council's letter states that they have asked the Environment Agency (EA) to attend to address a number of questions stated in their letter in a publicly available and transparent way, so that they can use that information to inform the Health Security Agency to determine the health impacts, and so that Staffordshire residents can assess the impact on their physical and mental health.

The EA note that the answers to Staffordshire County Council's questions in the letter are in the public domain and notably were answered by the EA and its partners at the public meeting hosted by the EA on 9 October 2023. A number of Staffordshire County Council Councillors attended this meeting. Health partners, including Dr Richard Harling, Staffordshire County Council's Director of Public Health and Care, and Kate Spence, Deputy Director at UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), were also present and responded to the questions regarding public health matters. A recording was made available on the EA's [EngagementHQ](#) website and Facebook Group immediately afterwards.

The EA has responded again, on 8 November 2023, to the Council's questions to help health experts provide further advice. While the EA cannot answer questions related to health, they have committed as far as possible to respond to the questions raised in their letter, to support those who are appropriately placed to do so.

However, as the information requested is already in the public domain, discussed at the virtual event and discussed with partners at the multi-agency Strategic Coordination Group, the EA believe that Staffordshire County Council have all the information requested to inform their discussion at the Health Scrutiny Committee. Consequently, they have decided not to attend.

This decision was also taken in part because this is a health scrutiny committee, and EA staff are not health experts. Their concern is that any EA staff member attending would be subject to questions about health advice that they cannot answer. This is what has happened when the EA have attended in the past, which has helped to inform their decision for this session.

The EA remain committed to working with our partners to ensure transparency and clarity over the issue with the hydrogen sulphide (H<sub>2</sub>S) air quality monitoring data around the Walleys Quarry Landfill Site. They are committed to keeping Staffordshire County Council and you personally updated on these matters.

I also note that Staffordshire County Council's Public Health team, UKHSA and the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board previously made a joint statement in regards to health impacts, available here: [Walleys Quarry - Staffordshire County Council](#).

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact us about this important issue.



**REBECCA POW MP**

The Rt Hon Rebecca Pow MP  
Minister for Environmental Quality and Resilience,  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Date: 13 November 2023

Dear Rebecca,

Thank you for your extremely prompt response to my correspondence of 7<sup>th</sup> November 2023, asking that the Secretary of State request attendance at a statutory committee by the Environment Agency at a forthcoming Staffordshire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny committee meeting to discuss the health impacts from Walleys Quarry, with the base data coming from the Environment Agency's monitoring equipment.

Thank you for indicating in your correspondence that the answers to the committee's questions are already in the public domain. However, if that is the case, then I am sure that the Environment Agency won't have any problems in attending the statutory committee just to provide those answers for committee to better understand.

Furthermore, whilst I have indicated the areas of interest, I cannot predict what committee members will ask, so I think it is probably a mistake to suggest that all questions have already been answered and are in the public domain.

Furthermore, at the Teams meeting with the Environment Agency in early October 2023, they indicated that they would be looking at the historic data and whether it could be extrapolated and that information is important to understand to understand the health impacts on the residents of Staffordshire. That information is not in the public domain and is in part what we need to explore and understand fully.

I am sure you are, like me, a great fan of the sanctity of Parliament and the right it has to get open and honest answers as part of its statutory role.

I am just asking for the same courtesy and transparency so that we can get at the facts of the situation so that the residents affected can best understand the impact that this situation has had on their health and wider wellbeing.

To be clear, without the input from the people responsible for gathering the data, we will be missing a key input to inform the health discussions for the day.

As a longstanding and experienced chair of this committee, I am happy that questions to the Environment Agency, which are outside of their remit can be easily redirected to the Health Security Agency, who have already confirmed attendance. And I am somewhat struggling to remember the Environment Agency ever extending into a health-based discussion in previous attendance at the committee, but I stand to be corrected. But I can give this assurance.

Finally, the role of committee is to stand outside of the formal Public Health, ICS and UKHSA structures so that effective scrutiny can take place, so whilst other agencies may have made joint statements, it is the outcomes from what has happened that need wider scrutiny, so that the general public can rely on the robustness of those statements.

Given the above, I think it would benefit the Environment Agency to reconsider their position, so that the committee can fulfil its statutory function at committee next Monday.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Jeremy Pert**  
**Staffordshire Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee –**  
**Chair**  
***on behalf of the***

**Staffordshire Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

CC Member of Parliament – Aaron Bell MP

Chief Executive, Environment Agency





# Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Our ref: PO2023/22420/MP

21 November 2023

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you for your follow up letter of 13 November 2023 concerning the Environment Agency's (EA) decision not to attend Staffordshire County Council's Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 November 2023.

I have discussed the points in your letter with the EA, and I understand it has not changed its decision to decline this invitation. As set out in my previous response, in part this decision is informed by prior experiences of attending this Committee where despite assurances, Councillors have used the opportunity to challenge the EA's regulation of the site in a manner outside the remit of the Committee and addressed health related questions to the EA. Therefore, the EA's decision not to attend is intended to support the committee's objective to scrutinise advice provided by relevant health authorities.

I know how important it is that the EA works closely with the local community. I am pleased with the commitment the EA has consistently shown in working with its partners to ensure transparency and clarity over the issue with the hydrogen sulphide air quality monitoring data around the Walleys Quarry Landfill site.

To keep the community updated, the EA held a public meeting in October, continues to share new information as it becomes available with health partners at the Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG), and publicly to all via its [Engagement HQ website](#). This includes all hydrogen sulphide data collected using the updated calibration methodology from September 2023.

I understand the health authorities at the SCG have made it clear the most important thing the EA can contribute to improving their health risk assessment is to progress the independent peer review of the methodology to assess whether historic data can be updated for that purpose. This methodology will be subject to an independent peer-review by a group of experts, led by Defra's Chief Scientific Advisor, Gideon Henderson. The group contains five members from five academic institutions (all of which are independent from Government and the EA).

I am reassured that this is where the EA are focusing their efforts. It has on 17 November brought the Scrutiny Committee and health partners attention to an [update](#) on the progress of the peer review that was made public the previous day.

I know that the EA remains committed to ensuring elected members of Staffordshire County Council are kept updated. I understand it is progressing a SCG action to agree how best to do that in the right way through the right forums.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me about this important issue.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Pow', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**REBECCA POW MP**