

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
ENVIRONMENTAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3 MARCH 2020  
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING  
AND GOVERNANCE)

AIR QUALITY MONITORING RESULTS FOR 2018

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The health risks of exposure to poor air quality are very serious. It has been reported that between 28,000 to 36,000 people die each year in the UK due to exposure to pollution.
- 1.2 Air pollution is a mixture of particles and gases that can have adverse effects on human health. The most important pollutants are particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen dioxide (NO).
- 1.3 This report together with a presentation will provide members with an update on the status of the air quality within Welwyn Hatfield and outline our monitoring programme in respect of the above mentioned pollutants. The presentation will also cover a brief summary relating to the installation of the councils real time nitrogen dioxide analyser.

**2 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and the work carried out by the Public Health and Protection Team.

**3 Explanation**

- 3.1 Air pollution damages lives with harmful effects on human health, the economy and the environment. It is the largest environmental risk to the public's health, contributing to cardiovascular disease, lung cancer and respiratory diseases. It increases the chances of hospital admissions, visits to Emergency Departments as well as respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms which interfere with everyday life. In the most severe cases it increases the risk of death, especially for people who are already vulnerable. Poor air quality affects everyone. It can have long term impacts on all and immediate effects on vulnerable people, with a disproportionate impact on the young and old, the sick and the poor.
- 3.2 There is now an extensive body of evidence that long-term exposure to everyday air pollutants over several years contributes to the development of cardiovascular disease (CVD), lung cancer, and respiratory disease
- 3.3 The Council regularly monitor levels of air quality across the borough, this is for both particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide. The particulates are measured by an automatic PM2.5 analyser and the nitrogen dioxide by diffusion tubes.
- 3.4 The Council is required to submit an annual status report to the Department for Environment Food and Rural affairs (DEFRA). The purpose of this report is to

provide a detailed summary of the monitoring results and to detail any future plans to improve air quality.

- 3.5 The Environment Act 1995 requires us to monitor levels of air quality and to take appropriate action if pollution levels exceed the “limit values” set out within the legislation.
- 3.6 If the limit values are exceeded then specific action is required. DEFRA require us to declare an air quality action area based on the locality of the monitoring. If an Air Quality Action area is declared then this will result in a significant amount of work, including the submission of a detailed report and various actions plans. The action plan would need to detail how the council proposes to reduce the levels of pollution to try and protect the local community.
- 3.7 The monitoring results for 2018 have identified that we no longer have a breach for the nitrogen dioxide levels at West View in Hatfield. At present we do not have any sites within the district that breach any of the limit values set in the Environment Act 1995, after distance corrections have been made to a relevant receptor.
- 3.8 DEFRA operate an air quality helpdesk call centre. This provides advice and guidance to local authorities who have any technical questions. In 2018 following the breach of the nitrogen dioxide limit at West View, Hatfield, DEFRA were informed of the marginal breach of the limit value. They instructed us to monitor in this location for a further 3 years and pay close attention to the results.
- 3.9 Following this breach of nitrogen dioxide levels noted in the 2018 report, we successful obtained a growth bid to purchase and install a roadside real time nitrogen dioxide analyser. We are currently at the final stages of installing the new nitrogen dioxide analyser at West View in Hatfield. We are aiming to have the analyser fully operational by the start of 2020.
- 3.10 If we are required to declare an air quality management area we will be required to undertake a detailed assessment. A detailed assessment is a very in depth review of our air quality results and a way to determine the certainty and accuracy of our results. If the result of such an assessment shows that people are at risk the authority must declare an air quality management area.
- 3.11 An air quality management area is a designated area of poor pollution levels. The authority must write and submit an action plan highlighting how they propose to try and manage and reduce the pollution levels in this area. This will include actions taken to inform members of the public who may live or venture into this area. The steps the authority will be required to take are in relation to restrictions to planning and any proposed developments, joint working with local highways agency to investigate changes in road layouts to reduce congestion. The authority will also be expected to investigate any other relevant steps that could reduce congestion and pollution levels.

### **Implications**

#### **4 Legal Implication(s)**

- 4.1 The Environment Act 1995 states that local authorities are required to periodically review and assess air quality within their areas. The government’s air quality strategy, confirms that local air quality management provides a major

component of the government's plan for air quality improvement across the UK. The Act also states that once an air quality limit value is breached we must then declare an air quality action area following a detailed assessment.

## **5 Financial Implication(s)**

- 5.1 At present we are monitoring air quality under our existing budget arrangements. However, if the Council decide to undertake more detailed monitoring of other pollutants then additional budget will be required.
- 5.2 Funding has been secured in respect of operational costs for the new nitrogen dioxide roadside analyser. This will enable us to operate and maintain the analyser for a period of 2 years once operational. After that time, a review will need to take place to evaluate costs and if necessary identify a budget to cover these costs.
- 5.3 If the monitoring results for future years indicate a breach in air quality levels then this will have a financial implication. Until the level of the breach is known the exact implications are difficult to predict but may involve investing in staff resources to manage the air quality programme, undertake the additional monitoring as well as detailed analysis of the results for DEFRA. It may also be necessary to purchase and maintain additional air quality monitoring equipment.

## **6 Risk Management Implications**

- 6.1 As detailed in the executive summary, the health risks of exposure to poor air quality are very serious. Failure to act on air quality may result in the authority being legally challenged together with a reputational risk from any such challenge.
- 6.2 Although our air quality monitoring network has increased significantly over the last few years, this work needs to continue. As explained earlier in the report, past monitoring identified an area within the borough which exceeded the limit value and as such this site needs to be carefully managed going forward. Failure to carefully monitor our borough for poor air quality may lead to legal challenge together with reputational risk.

## **7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)**

- 7.1 None

## **8 Procurement Implication(s)**

- 8.1 None

## **9 Climate Change Implication(s)**

- 9.1 Air quality and climate change are fundamentally interrelated. A reduction in the emissions of many common air pollutants will lessen the impact on climate change and therefore have a positive impact.
- 9.2 The Council has recently declared a climate change emergency in Welwyn Hatfield and as such failure to deliver adequate air quality monitoring and associated remedial action may lead to legal challenge and associated reputational risks.

## **10 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 10.1 The health risks of exposure to poor air quality are very serious and is the largest environmental risk to the public's health, contributing to cardiovascular disease, lung cancer and respiratory diseases
- 10.2 The air quality monitoring programme will help us in identifying areas of poor air quality so that we can notify vulnerable members of the community as well as trying to reduce pollution in the locality.
- 10.3 The work outlined in this report has a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents.

## **11 Communication and Engagement**

- 11.1 The councils air quality monitoring results are available to everyone on the councils website (<http://welhat.gov.uk/article/281/Air-Quality-and-Public-Health>) and on the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire air quality monitoring website ([http://www.airqualityengland.co.uk/local-authority/?la\\_id=408](http://www.airqualityengland.co.uk/local-authority/?la_id=408)). The websites display live air quality monitoring data as well as providing access to our annual air quality progress reports.

## **12 Link to Corporate Priorities**

- 12.1 The council is working towards our goal which is to have a better understanding of local air quality and how we can make improvements. This report is linked to the council's priorities "maintain a safe and healthy community", and "protect and enhance the environment".

## **13 Equality and Diversity**

- 13.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out in connection with the proposals that are set out in this report as it relates purely to monitoring information. However, if it is appropriate to declare an Air Quality Action area then a further assessment may need to be made.

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Date                                         *7 January 2020*

PowerPoint presentation to cover all topics listed in section 2.1.

Appendices - Appendix 1 – PowerPoint presentation