

**WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 JULY 2016
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (GOVERNANCE)**

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL AIR QUALITY ALERT SCHEME

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report asks members to consider whether Welwyn Hatfield Council should join the proposed Hertfordshire air quality alert scheme. Hertfordshire County Council is offering this service for free to members of the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire air quality group, of which this council is a member.
- 1.2 Currently we rely upon members of the public to visit the group's website of their own accord to find out local pollution levels. This alert scheme will allow us to make contact with members of the public through various social media channels so we can inform them proactively.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 For the Committee to note the scheme and consider if a recommendation should be made to Cabinet for Council to join the scheme.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The Public Health and Protection service carries out routine work to monitor levels of air quality across the borough. This is an ongoing process and one that we work to improve continuously. We monitor air quality across the borough by the use of diffusion tubes and a continuous real time air quality monitor.
- 3.2 We are required to submit an air quality update and screening assessment to DEFRA every 3 years. The purpose of the update and screening assessment is to provide a details summary of the monitoring results for the past 3 years and to detail any future plans to improve air quality.
- 3.3 The law requires us to monitor levels of air quality and places a responsibility on the council to keep pollutions levels below the limit values set out within the legislation. Monitoring results are analysed on a yearly basis and then presented in an annual air quality progress report to DEFRA. In such cases where the results are above the limit values set out within the legislation specific action is required. DEFRA require us to declare an air quality action area based on the locality of the monitoring. This requires a significant amount of work and involves submitting 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.
- 3.4 We are a part of the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire air quality network. This group is made up of the local authorities across Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. We share information, data and meet on a quarterly basis to provide local

updates. We operate a website <http://www.hertsbedsair.net/> that provides a combination of our real time and historical air quality monitoring data.

- 3.5 The proposed new scheme (as set out in appendix A) would comprise a more proactive targeting of air alert information, rather than relying on people to go looking for it. A similar scheme using text messages was in place a few years ago, but folded owing to technological difficulties.
- 3.6 In essence the new scheme would work by an alert would being sent by Hertfordshire County Council (to agreed recipients) if one of the air quality monitors within Hertfordshire recorded a high reading. Every local authority has an air quality monitor. The alert would provide details of the area currently experiencing high pollution levels.
- 3.7 Real time data will be captured locally by using our own air quality monitoring station. This will enable members of the public that suffer with breathing difficulties to be more informed about their local environment.
- 3.8 This could be a useful way of assisting those with breathing difficulties by informing them when they may wish to avoid visiting specific locations
- 3.9 The local authorities that are part of the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire air quality network are all in favour of the proposed alert scheme. This is a key opportunity to reach the local community and provide real time information to those who require it most.
- 3.10 The scheme would require targeted publicity including updates to our web pages to make people aware of its existence. If members are in agreement, an evaluation report will be brought back to a future committee for information.

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.
- 4.2 There is a nationwide air quality network that is operated by DEFRA. This monitoring network does not operate on a local level. DEFRA often provide alerts based upon predictive information from their nationwide monitoring network. There is a possibility that the alerts provided by DEFRA may contradict the alerts provided by our local monitoring stations. This is unlikely to occur and in most cases monitoring a local level will be more accurate than predicted data.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 None directly arising from this report. A public health grant of £20k has been successfully secured for the new real time analyser and there is provision within the public health and protection annual base budget for the diffusion tube monitoring programme. There is no fee for using this service.
- 5.2 It is predicted that the resources for delivering this project can be met from existing staff resources. This is due to the fact that Hertfordshire County Council will be analysing the data that has been collected and will be providing the alerts.

Should we decide to join the scheme we will be required to forward any alert messages via our social media channels to recipients of our choice, and this can be handled by public health and protection staff using the public health and protection social media accounts which have previously been set up and are in use. It would make sense to undertake some targeted marketing of this scheme and again there is provision within the base budget for health promotion activities, and accordingly additional funding is not viewed as necessary for carrying out this work.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 The health risks of exposure to poor air quality are well documented and potentially serious. It has been reported that nearly 30,000 people die each year in the UK due to exposure to pollution. This figure is rising and will continue to do so if steps are not taken to reduce pollution levels.
- 6.2 In Hertfordshire, approximately 514 deaths amongst the 25+ population are thought attributable to fine particulate (PM2.5) air pollution each year. This equates to 5,258 life years lost. ⁽¹⁾
- 6.3 We have been working hard to improve our air quality monitoring network in the last few years and need to continue with this work.
- 6.4 It is not only important that we monitor levels of air pollution but to ensure we publicise the data in as many public forums as possible. We need to provide a service to the community and make the data as accessible as it can be. There is a risk that if we do not join and support the alert scheme that our local residents will remain uninformed.
- 6.5 It should be considered a priority that the council take on board the serious health effects that can be attributed to poor air quality and the proposal of improving the information we provide

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 None directly arising from this report

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 None directly arising from this report

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 Climate change has a direct link to pollutants produced by motor vehicles. In light of this, any steps that can be taken to improve how we alert the community to the effects of such pollution are considered positive.

10 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 10.1 This report is linked to the council's priorities "maintain a safe and healthy community", "protect and enhance the environment", "help build a strong and local economy", "engage with our communities and provide value for money". Additionally we are required to monitor levels of air quality across the borough under the Environment Act 1995.

11 Equality and Diversity

- 11.1 An equality impact screening assessment has been carried out in connection with the proposals set out in this report. The results of this screening exercise reveal that the proposal has no particular effect on any of the 9 protected equality characteristics and therefore the matter does not need to proceed to a full equality impact assessment. However, we should consider that certain groups could be considered more susceptible and vulnerable to poor air quality such as children and the elderly.

Terry Vincent
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Monday 13th June 2016

Appendix A:

See attached report detailing information regarding the alert scheme.

References:

- (1) <http://jsna.hertslls.org/> (health & wellbeing in Hertfordshire)