

Part I

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All Wards

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET – 6 AUGUST 2024

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT SERVICES AND CLIMATE CHANGE)

AIR QUALITY STRATEGY 2024

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Local authorities (district councils in two-tier areas) are expected to take preventative action to improve air quality through a local Air Quality Strategy.
- 1.2 Many of the actions in our existing Air Quality Action Plan are aligned with actions that are in the Climate Action plan.
- 1.3 Welwyn Hatfield does not have pollution levels that exceed the 'limit values' in the legislation and therefore do not have air quality management areas or action plans that would be required when air quality management areas are declared.
- 1.4 In August 2023, the Government updated their Policy paper titled 'Air quality strategy: framework for local authority delivery'. It sets out a number of actions for local authorities (most of which we already take) and for the UK Government on improving air quality. Importantly, the key change is that the policy sets 2 new legal requirements for the reduction of particulate matter PM2.5.
- 1.5 PM2.5 is particulate matter in air emitted from human activities like burning fuels, braking and various industrial processes, as well as from natural sources such as sea spray and dust. The new legal requirements for reduction of PM2.5 (each with an interim target) are:
 - 10 µg/m³ annual mean concentration PM2.5 nationwide by 2040, with an interim target of 12 µg/m³ by January 2028 (*we already meet this legal requirement*)
 - 35% reduction in average population exposure by 2040, with an interim target of a 22% reduction by January 2028, both compared to a 2018 baseline.
- 1.6 The Air Quality Strategy in Appendix A sets out our approach towards monitoring of air quality in the borough and the actions that we already take. In addition, it sets out new actions further to our existing Air Quality Action Plan in that we will consider how we can reduce PM2.5 in the borough further to meet the new legal requirements, and also that we will consider whether smoke control areas are needed.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note and approve the Air Quality Strategy in Appendix A.

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, 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 The Environmental Health Team 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 and an automatic analyser.
- 3.3 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council do not have air quality parameters that exceed the legal limit values at this current time, so there is no requirement for an Air Quality Management Area or action plan.
- 3.4 The council's air quality monitoring data shows that pollution levels reduced between 2018 to 2019. When the Covid 19 pandemic hit, the data in the main shows a noticeable reduction in pollution levels for 2020. As the pandemic eased, traffic levels increased and the population started to travel more again. However, there has been a significant change in general working practices in that many people are now permitted to work from home more often. So at this present time, the data demonstrates that current pollution levels have not generally returned to pre pandemic levels.
- 3.5 We have developed an Air Quality Strategy which is at Appendix A. The primary aim and objective of our strategy is to focus on air quality improvement. We are committed to creating a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable community for our residents. The actions that are already being undertaken are listed under section 7 of the Strategy.
- 3.6 The council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and subsequently developed a climate change strategy and climate action. The council has a commitment to being net zero as an organisation by 2030 and as a borough by 2050.
- 3.7 The Air Quality Strategy will feed into the climate change agenda as the two issues are interlinked in many ways, and mitigation and adaptation measures can result in a number of mutual benefits.
- 3.8 In August 2023, the Government updated their Policy paper titled 'Air quality strategy: framework for local authority delivery'. It sets out a number of actions for local authorities (most of which we already take) and for the UK Government on improving air quality. Importantly, the key change is that the policy sets 2 new legal requirements for the reduction of particulate matter PM2.5.
- 3.9 PM2.5 is particulate matter in air emitted from human activities like burning fuels, braking and various industrial processes, as well as from natural sources such as

sea spray and dust. The new legal requirements for reduction of PM2.5 (each with an interim target) are:

- 10 µg/m³ annual mean concentration PM2.5 nationwide by 2040, with an interim target of 12 µg/m³ by January 2028 (*we already meet this legal requirement*)
- 35% reduction in average population exposure by 2040, with an interim target of a 22% reduction by January 2028, both compared to a 2018 baseline.

3.10 The Air Quality Strategy in Appendix A sets out new actions in section 12 further to our existing Air Quality Action Plan in that we will consider how we can reduce PM2.5 in the borough further to meet the new legal requirements, and also that we will consider whether smoke control areas are needed.

4 Legal Implication(s)

4.1 The Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities to periodically review air quality within their areas. They must also make an assessment of whether air quality standards and objectives are being achieved or are likely to be achieved within the authority's area. 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. Our monitoring does not show that any air quality limits have been exceeded.

4.2 The Government's updated Policy paper titled 'Air quality strategy: framework for local authority delivery' sets out 2 new legal requirements for the reduction of particulate matter PM2.5 as set out in paragraph 3.9. The Air Quality Strategy in Appendix A explains that the annual mean concentration for PM2.5 is already met but further reduction of PM2.5 levels to meet the 2028 and 2040 legal requirements will be explored.

5 Financial Implications

5.1 At present we will continue to monitor air quality under our existing budget and resources and therefore there are currently no additional financial implications.

5.2 It is likely some of the actions may have financial implications. Once fully assessed, if affordable this will be addressed through the budget setting process, or updates to the action plan will be made as appropriate.

6 Risk Management Implications

6.1 The health risks of exposure from poor air quality are very serious. The Environmental Health Team increased our air quality monitoring network over the last few years to ensure extensive monitoring. Failure to adequately monitor air quality and to act on poor air quality could pose a risk to the authority of legal challenge and reputational risk.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

7.1 There are no implications from this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 There are no implications from this report.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

9.1 Climate change has a direct link to pollutants produced by motor vehicles, agriculture, development and industrial processes. In light of this, any steps taken to reduce levels of pollution within the borough will have a positive effect on climate change.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

10.1 There are no implications from this report.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

11.1 Our air quality monitoring programme ensures that we can identify areas of poor air quality. It is possible to notify members of the community if this occurs with air quality alerts. Actions taken as part of the Strategy are also to reduce poor air quality. The overall intention is to try to improve and protect the community's health and wellbeing.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

12.1 The council's air quality monitoring results are available on the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire air quality monitoring website. The website displays live air quality monitoring data to inform our residents.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

13.1 The Air Quality Strategy supports the council's priority of 'Action on Climate change' and is relevant in the context of the declared climate emergency.

14 Equality and Diversity

14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out in connection with the proposals as there is no change to policy or services.

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Appendices to be listed:

Appendix A – Air Quality Strategy 2024