

**WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 25TH SEPTEMBER 2017
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING AND
GOVERNANCE)**

AIR QUALITY UPDATE

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The health risks of exposure to poor air quality are very serious. It has been reported that nearly 30,000 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.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - Note the current status of the air quality within Welwyn Hatfield and
 - Note the potential action required if the Council are required to declare an Air Quality Action Area

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 Public Health and Protection 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.

- 3.4 The Council is required to submit an air quality update and screening assessment to the Department for Environment Food and Rural affairs (DEFRA). The purpose of the update and screening assessment is to provide a details summary of the monitoring results and to detail any future plans to improve air quality.
- 3.5 The legislation also 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 2016 have identified an area within our borough, where the levels of pollutants are close to the limit values. The area in question is within the vicinity of Comet Way and Hatfield Business Park, Hatfield.
- 3.8 Careful monitoring will now to take place in the identified location to assist us in deciding upon the most appropriate course of action to take.
- 3.9 Prior to declaring an air quality management area we will be required to undertake a detailed assessment reviewing our air quality results. The assessment also requires us to validate and verify the results obtained and the processes and procedures undertaken by the lab. If after the detailed assessment identifies that the public are at risk form poor air quality, then the authority must declare an air quality management area.
- 3.10 An air quality management area is a designated area of poor pollution levels. Once declared the authority must develop and submit an action plan highlighting how they propose to try and manage and reduce the pollution levels in this area. Examples of the actions include establishing a communication strategy to inform members of the public who may live or venture into this area of the situation with our air quality.
- 3.11 The authority must also take steps must in relation to restrictions on planning and any proposed developments as well as 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 will continue to monitor air quality under our existing arrangements and therefore there are currently no additional financial implications.
- 5.2 However, if the results for 2017 indicate a breach in air quality levels then this will have a financial implication. The implications will be based on the need to invest extra staff resources to implement the requirements of declaring an Air Quality Action Area. More comprehensive and detailed monitoring will, be required as well as the production of a detailed report for DEFRA. If it is decided that we need to declare an air quality action area, then the purchase and maintenance of additional air quality monitoring equipment will be required.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 As outlined in the executive summary, the health risks of exposure to poor air quality are very serious. The Public Health and Protection Team have increased our air quality monitoring network over the last few years but this work needs to continue. The result of previous years monitoring indicate that we have an area with poor air quality levels in the borough and this needs to be carefully managed as well as ensuring the other locations are regularly monitored. Failure to act on poor air quality result may open the authority to legal challenge and reputational risk.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 None.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 None.

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 taken to reduce levels of pollution within the borough will have a positive effect on climate change.

10 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 10.1 This report is linked to the council's priorities "maintain a safe and healthy community", and "protect and enhance the environment".

11 Equality and Diversity

- 11.1 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.

Appendices

Presentation - Air Quality Locations
Presentation - Air Quality Results

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