

Part I

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All Wards

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 10 OCTOBER 2023
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD)

AIR QUALITY ANNUAL STATUS REPORT 2023

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Every year we are required to submit an annual air quality report to DEFRA, showing our yearly monitoring results. The latest report is in Appendix A. This report must now be reviewed and approved to enable submission to DEFRA. DEFRA will then review the report and if approved, we will then be able to publish it to the public on our website.
- 1.2 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.
- 2 The status report in Appendix A shows that there has been a general reduction in pollution levels, especially during covid pandemic in 2020. There are some locations where the pollution has increased again when the pandemic eased but are not back to pre- pandemic levels.

3 Recommendation(s)

- 3.1 To note the status of air quality within Welwyn Hatfield borough.
- 3.2 Approve the report for submission to DEFRA and for publishing.

4 Explanation

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 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 and an automatic analyser.

- 4.4 The Council is required to submit an annual status report and air quality strategy to the Department for Environment Food and Rural affairs (DEFRA). The purpose of these reports is to provide a detailed summary of the monitoring results and to detail any future plans to improve air quality.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 If the limit values are exceeded, then specific action is required. DEFRA would 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 would result in 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.
- 4.7 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council do not have air quality parameters that exceed the limit values at this current time, so there is no requirement for an Air Quality Management Area or action plan.
- 4.8 The council’s data shows that pollution levels reduced between 2018 to 2019. When the Covid 19 pandemic hit, the data in the main shows a noticable reduction in pollution levels for 2020.
- 4.9 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.
- 4.10 The data for 2021 and 2022 shows some fluctuations in certain locations. There are improvements in some areas but then regression in others. This is likely to be down to the fact that the country is still adjusting and recovering from the pandemic, some businesses are still changing working patterns and the requirement for people to return to office working. However, the changes in levels are considered to be minor and will hopefully show consistent improvements in future years.

5 Legal Implication(s)

- 5.1 The Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities to periodically review air quality, for the time being and the likely future 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 relevant period, 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.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 At present we will continue to monitor air quality under our existing budget and resources and therefore there are currently no additional financial implications.
- 6.2 If the monitoring results for future years indicate a breach in air quality levels, then this could have a financial implication. The implications will be based on the need to invest additional staff resources into additional monitoring and the production of a detailed report for DEFRA. There may also be a requirement to purchase and maintain additional air quality monitoring equipment.

7 Risk Management Implications

- 7.1 The health risks of exposure from poor air quality are very serious. The Public Health and Protection Team have 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.

8 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are no implications from this report.

9 Procurement Implication(s)

- 9.1 There are no implications from this report.

10 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 10.1 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.

11 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 11.1 There are no implications from this report.

12 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 12.1 The intention of the air quality monitoring programme is so that we can identify areas of poor air quality. We will then be able to notify members of the community as well as trying to reduce pollution in the locality. The overall intention is to try to improve and protect the community's health and wellbeing.

13 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 13.1 The councils air quality monitoring results are available on the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire air quality monitoring website. The website displays live air quality monitoring data.

14 Link to Corporate Priorities

14.1 This report is linked to the council’s priorities “maintain a safe and healthy community”, and “protect and enhance the environment” and is obviously relevant in the context of the recently declared climate emergency.

15 Equality and Diversity

15.1 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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Appendices to be listed:

Appendix A – Air quality annual status report 2023.