

REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

Date of Meeting: 9 September 2014

Report of: Environmental Health and Licensing Manager

Title: Local Air Quality Management, Air Quality Action Plan 2011-2016 and 2013 Air Quality Progress Report

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

To update Members on the council's duties relating to local air quality management and work being conducted on a Low Emissions Strategy.

2. Recommendations:

That Scrutiny Committee – Community:

- 1) note the progress on the Air Quality Action Plan; and
- 2) supports the development of a Low Emissions Strategy to fulfil air quality objectives and to reduce health effects of poor air quality; and
- 3) supports wide stakeholder consultation in the Low Emissions Strategy commencing 01 September 2014.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

Action on local air quality is a legal duty placed upon the Council by the Environment Act 1995 – Part IV, and safeguarding air quality will help reduce any detrimental effects from air pollution on the health and wellbeing of Exeter's population.

The effects of local air pollution on health are undisputed, with the young, the elderly and those with existing medical conditions being particularly vulnerable. A recent estimate is that the equivalent of 42 lives per year could be saved in the city, if particulate air pollution (these are minute particles suspended in the air, e.g. from tail pipe emissions, brake dust, industry and in some cases the natural environment) were removed altogether.

In Exeter, the main source of local air pollution is from traffic. The areas most affected are those beside busy roads with queuing traffic, where the houses are close to the kerbside. Those that live in these specific areas are more affected by poor air quality.

Measures to improve air quality require action by the travelling public, businesses, Devon County Council (as the Highways Authority) as well as by Exeter City Council. A successful engagement with stakeholders and increasing the profile of traffic-related air pollution as a localised issue of concern, will be important in determining the effectiveness of any measures implemented

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

The second Air Quality Action Plan and management of the Low Emissions Strategy project will be delivered within existing resources. Funding has been successfully bid for and obtained from DEFRA for the delivery of the Low Emissions Strategy.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

None – funding has been received from DEFRA

6. What are the legal aspects?

The Environment Act 1995 – Part IV places a duty on Local Authorities to review and assess air quality in their area, and to take action where pollution levels exceed objectives. The EU has now commenced legal action against the UK for breaches of the objectives, and Central Government could pass any resulting fines to Local Authorities; it is not clear at this stage how this would be formulated.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

The (Deputy) Monitoring Officer had no comments to add.

8. Report details:

The City Council compares measured levels of pollution to EU objectives every year. The objectives define the concentration below which significant risk to public health are unlikely. The 2014 Air Quality Progress Report contains the 2013 data. This concludes that concentrations of all local pollutants are stable, or possibly decreasing slightly. The 2014 Air Quality Progress Report can be viewed on the air quality pages of the council's website.

Exeter City Council declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2007 (amended 2011) because levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) exceeded objective levels at some locations. The area covers all of the main traffic routes in the city. Concentrations of NO₂ are highest beside busy roads and studies have shown traffic emissions along congested routes are the main cause.

The City Council has a duty to produce an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) to identify measures that will work towards resolving the exceedence of the air quality objectives within the Air Quality Management Area. Exeter's Air Quality Action Plan was updated in 2011. The measures within the plan are proportionate to the funding and resources available and acknowledge the significant upward pressures on NO₂ emissions which will result from proposed growth and development in the greater Exeter area. The Plan's four objectives are shown below, with supporting text:

- 1 To describe the impact of predicted growth and existing plans on NO₂ concentrations within the Air Quality Management Area.
 - Current plans and policies are expected to have a low positive impact on air quality, although there is some uncertainty associated with this. This is a modest

predicted change, but should be set against the background of significant development in the city and therefore significant upward pressure on emissions.

- 2 To identify where further improvements are required, how these could be achieved and where multiple benefits can be realised.
 - The Council obtained a DEFRA grant for establishing a Low Emission Strategy. This project will be completed in February 2015 and has the following strategic aims:
 - a) To integrate low emission strategies into mainstream policy development for transport and planning within Exeter and to influence policy in the greater Exeter area.
 - b) To reduce emissions from the Council-owned fleet and grey fleet, including by increased uptake of low emission vehicles.
 - c) To work with partners in the private and public sectors to increase the uptake of sustainable transport choices, including low emission vehicles within the greater Exeter area.
 - The Council will make closer links between air quality and climate change work, to recognise multiple benefits.
 - It is important that the negative health impacts of poor air quality are better understood and communicated locally.
- 3 To provide a process for assessing the air quality aspect of the sustainability of future plans and policies.
- 4 To provide tools to engage local communities in air quality issues alongside wider sustainability issues.

Progress in implementing the Air Quality Action Plan is reported on annually in an Air Quality Action Plan Progress Report. The 2014 report, which describes progress during 2013 is available on the air quality pages of the council's website:

<http://www.exeter.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=15176>

This report shows that progress with implementation of the AQAP is generally good, with this to continue through 2014. It is worth noting that during the last ten years, peak time traffic levels have decreased, although it is not possible to categorically link cause and effect between this and any air quality improvement. This situation will be kept under review in future years.

The Low Emissions Strategy project started in January 2014. So far, models have been produced of current baseline emissions and emissions in 2018. These will be used to test scenarios and assess the impact of potential actions. Six stakeholder meetings and a steering group workshop have identified a range of actions which will be considered for inclusion in the final strategy.

Initial consultation on the Strategy options will begin on 1 September 2014, by means of an online survey. The Council hopes to engage with residents groups and businesses by means of targeted publicity at specific groups, as well as a general press release. This is seen as the first step in raising awareness of air pollution as a localised problem, and so

Environmental Health and Licensing intend to obtain as wide coverage of this consultation as possible. A more detailed consultation on the draft strategy will take place later in the autumn.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

The main contribution of effective management of air quality is to support the purpose of Keep me / my environment safe and healthy and building a stronger city. However in achieving this, it is necessary to proactively engage with other key purpose areas that could be affected by or through poor air quality. These include working with developers through the planning system to deliver good development including infrastructure, and working with business to run a successful business to ensure that any emissions to air that they may produce are kept within legal limits.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

Various risks have been identified to the successful implementation of the Air Quality Action plan and development of the Low Emissions Strategy. These include failure to engage with partners and, the impact of development in the greater Exeter area on traffic levels. These risks are monitored as part of the Low Emissions Strategy project management, and changes to the Action Plan can be made as appropriate.

11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

Areas with high levels of air pollution also tend to be relatively deprived. This means that more deprived populations are disproportionately affected. There is also a higher incidence amongst deprived populations of the types of diseases that are exacerbated by poor air quality. Thus the most vulnerable members of society are often worst affected by air pollution. The actions described in this report work to reduce the health impacts of poor local air quality.

12. Are there any other options?

Action to reduce local air pollution where levels exceed the government objectives is a legal duty.

Assistant Director Environment

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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