

REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY AND EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 03 March 2015 / 17 March 2015

Report of: Environmental Health and Licensing Manager

Title: Adoption of the Low Emissions Strategy

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive function

1. What is the report about?

This report is to advise members about the development of a Low Emissions Strategy for Exeter, and to ask members to recommend that the strategy is adopted.

The Low Emissions Strategy has been developed to achieve further reductions in emissions of local and global air pollutants from traffic in the city, within the context of sustainable development of the city, by a range of proposed measures that are outlined in the document.

Exeter City Council has taken the lead in developing the Low Emissions Strategy, but it is just one partner involved in reducing emission of local air pollutants and their health impacts, and the Strategy reflects this.

The Strategy makes it clear that with vision and commitment, a step change in emissions in the city could be achieved, with benefits to the local population and economy.

2. Recommendations:

- 1) That Scrutiny Committee - Community supports the Low Emissions Strategy for Exeter for the period 2015-2018
- 2) That Executive recommends Council formally adopts the Low Emissions Strategy circulated with this report as the Low Emissions Strategy for Exeter for the period 2015-2018

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

Poor local air quality affects the health of those living and working in Exeter. The highest impacts on human health come from particulate matter (PM), but evidence for the effects of nitrogen dioxide is growing. For example, the effect of the smallest particulates (PM2.5) on mortality in the UK in 2008 was estimated to be equivalent to 29,000 premature deaths per annum. A local estimate puts annual mortality within Exeter at the equivalent of 42 deaths per year.

Impacts on health of this scale have a significant effect on human wellbeing and the economy. Recent evidence suggests that:

- In the UK, pollution related illnesses are responsible for more absences from the workplace over recent years than industrial disputes.
- Small changes in fine particles (i.e. PM2.5) were associated with lower school assessment grades for high-school age children, because of school absences and reduced productivity while learning at school.

- Removing all exposure to particulate matter would have a greater impact on life expectancy than eliminating passive smoking or road traffic accidents.
- The costs to the UK economy in 2010 were roughly 5% of GDP.

The understanding of air quality costs and impacts is in its infancy and so care must be taken when quoting the effects listed above. Nevertheless, important implications for health, wellbeing and economic growth are starting to emerge (Natural Capital Committee 2015).

In 2011 Exeter City Council declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) because measured levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) were higher in some parts of the city than European Union (EU) limit values and the UK's national objectives for air quality. The main sources of the high NO₂ concentrations are transport emissions, and this is reflected in the AQMA boundary, which includes all of the main routes into and around the city.

Reducing transport emissions and economic growth should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Rather, the opposite is true. For example, for businesses, reducing fuel consumption and increasing fuel efficiency reduces costs and improves profitability. Similarly, reducing the number of journeys made by private vehicles, where alternatives exist, will increase the efficiency of the road network for other users.

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

The Strategy contains a range of proposed measures. Some of these will be delivered within existing staff resources and some are schemes that have already been committed and therefore have no new resource implications.

The remaining measures will require funding by a combination of partners and by a variety of means (such as through the Local Enterprise Partnership, by developer contributions or investment from business). The Strategy also recommends that applications are made for grant funding from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV). The resource implications for each measure are set out in the Strategy, which has been circulated with this report.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no funding commitments as a result of this report. Measures identified have either already been approved and committed for funding through other programmes, or in the case of new measures proposed by the LES, will only be taken forward if funding is found through grants, applications and from partners' funding streams. Any financial implications for the Council will need to be put forward as part of the financial planning process and considered in light of the Council's financial position at that time.

6. What are the legal aspects?

Exeter City Council has legal duties with respect to local air quality management. These have resulted in the Council declaring an Air Quality Management Area and producing an Air Quality Action Plan. This is because concentrations of one pollutant, nitrogen dioxide, exceed health based national air quality standards in some parts of the city. The development of a Low Emissions Strategy was recommended within the Air Quality Action Plan.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

The contents of this report raise no issues for the Monitoring Officer

8. Report details:

Exeter is one of the greenest and healthiest cities in the country. But as in all cities, pollution from cars, lorries, buses and vans does cause poorer air quality. The Low Emissions Strategy explains steps that will be taken to reduce transport emissions of nitrous oxides (NO_x) and contribute towards meeting the EU limit values for NO₂, whilst also reducing emissions of particulates, noise and carbon dioxide (CO₂). It seeks to improve connections between the work done by air quality officers and public health specialists, to reduce the impact that air pollution has on people's health and to increase understanding of the problem amongst those living and working in the city. The Strategy covers the period from 2015 to 2018 and its aims are:

1. To take actions that will reduce emissions from transport in Exeter and support sustainable development.
2. To reduce emissions from all classes of vehicles, and to work with all groups who travel or who generate traffic, including emissions from the council owned fleet and staff vehicles (driven for business use).
3. To improve the understanding of air pollution as an issue that should be considered during the development of policy, and to influence decisions made in the Greater Exeter area.
4. To actively seek funding opportunities to implement stretching and innovative measures, especially opportunities to increase the use of ultra-low emission vehicles.
5. To evaluate the success of the strategy and report annually. To use the lessons learned during the strategy period to develop a strategy for 2018 onwards.

Exeter City Council firmly believes that the successful implementation of the Low Emission Strategy depends on the involvement of and consultation with businesses and residents (locally based stakeholders). This strategy already reflects contributions from each of these, and a summary of consultations is included in the document. Low transport emissions, and a vibrant growing economy are both seen as part of a sustainable future for Exeter, where cleaner vehicles, more efficient use of vehicles and reduced number of vehicles combine to reduce emissions and costs.

The strategy contains actions that are arranged under 6 themes:

- Exeter City Council actions
- Business and employer actions
- Commuting / personal travel
- Reducing congestion on roads
- Encouraging low emission vehicles
- Health and awareness

The strategy includes some actions which are in progress or just starting out and integrates these with new initiatives where possible. The strategy is for the period 2015-2018, after which it will be reviewed and updated, based on an evaluation of the first three year period.

A LES steering group will be set up and meet quarterly to identify opportunities for delivering schemes within the city. The objective is to help ensure future transport funding is delivered to the most appropriate schemes in terms of growing the economy, whilst mitigating the impact of travel on people's health and the environment. The steering group includes representatives from Exeter City Council, Devon County Council, and key partners.

The LES steering group will engage with the Local Enterprise Partnership to try to ensure that air quality is a consideration when funding is allocated within the region, particularly where it affects travel to and from Exeter. To ensure buy in on air quality issues the first output of the LES steering group will be to deliver a workshop on air quality to both the Local Enterprise Partnership and Chamber of Commerce members in 2015. This workshop will highlight the issues of poor air quality, before demonstrating the clear delivery plan of the LES and how this, with assistance from partners, can help to bring Exeter's air quality into line with EU standards.

As part of the work to develop this strategy the Council has developed a significant body of evidence about traffic, emissions and their impact on air quality. Details are provided in Appendix 2 to the document. This work has been used to test the potential benefits of a range of possible actions, and helped to decide what should be included in the strategy. The analysis shows that by implementing only the most feasible measures in the strategy there will be a measurable reduction of emissions and a small improvement in air quality. However, much greater benefits are possible if the strategy is delivered in full and reaches its ambitious potential and this will bring significant benefits to air quality. The task now is to implement as many of the actions in the strategy as possible in order to turn these predicted changes into real benefits for reduced pollutant and CO₂ emissions.

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

The decision contributes to the purpose of 'keep me and my environment safe and healthy' within the Council's Corporate Plan. It will have additional positive impacts on 'delivering good development' and 'help me to run a successful business'.

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

The effectiveness of the Strategy depends on funding being available to implement the measures. In the case of measures that have already been agreed by other means, this risk is low. However a large number of measures, including some of the most significant in terms of their impact on emissions, depend on future funding which has not yet been committed.

Ongoing support from elected members for the Strategy will reduce the risk that funding is allocated to projects that do not result in sustainable development and reduced emissions.

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?

The purpose of the Strategy is to reduce emissions of pollution which are harmful to health and the environment. Those affected most by poor air quality are people with existing medical conditions, the young and the elderly and so these groups will receive the greatest positive benefit from the Strategy. Pollution concentrations are highest beside busy and congested roads, so the populations living in these areas will also receive greater benefit from the Strategy.

12. Are there any other options?

If the Strategy is not adopted, Exeter City Council could choose to either take no specific action, or to lobby Devon County Council to act independently to reduce traffic emissions. However the partnership approach which the development of the Strategy has engendered is seen as the most effective option.

Assistant Director

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Natural Capital Committee (2015). The State of Natural Capital, Protecting and Improving Natural Capital for Prosperity and Wellbeing.

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