

## **REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY, EXECUTIVE AND COUNCIL**

**Date of Meeting: 10 November 2015, 1 December 2015 and 15 December 2015**

**Report of: Environmental Health and Licensing Manager**

**Title: Renewal of the Air Quality Strategy**

### **Is this a Key Decision?**

Yes

### **Is this an Executive or Council Function?**

Council

#### **1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1 This report is to advise members about the renewal of the Air Quality Strategy, and to ask members to recommend that the strategy is adopted.
- 1.2 The previous Air Quality Strategy covered the period from 2009 to 2014, and so an updated Strategy is now required.

#### **2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Committee Community supports the Air Quality Strategy 2015-2020 circulated with this report.
- 2.2 That Executive supports the Air Quality Strategy 2015-2020 circulated with this report.
- 2.3 That Council formally adopts the Air Quality Strategy 2015-2020.

#### **3. Reasons for the recommendation:**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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).

- 3.4 This Air Quality Strategy describes all the air quality work that the council will undertake in the next five years, the statutory context for this work, and how it will contribute to reduced air pollution.

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

- 4.1 The Strategy can be implemented fully using existing staffing resources. Financial resource is currently in place to maintain the current air quality monitoring equipment. Capital expenditure would be required if the air quality monitoring equipment needed replacing, but this would be dealt with through the submission of a capital expenditure report if required.

**5. Section 151 Officer comments:**

- 5.1 There are no additional financial implications contained within this report.

**6. What are the legal aspects?**

- 6.1 Exeter City Council has legal duties with respect to local air quality management (Environment Act 1995) and statutory nuisances (Environmental Protection Act 1990). The Air Quality Strategy is not a legal requirement but does explain how the Council will fulfil its statutory duties.

**7. Monitoring Officer's comments:**

- 7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

**8. Report details:**

- 8.1 The Air Quality Strategy draws together the existing air quality work undertaken by Environmental Health and Licensing at Exeter City Council (the Council). All of this work is driven by statutory obligations and the strategy provides a means of organising and co-ordinating it to best effect. This Strategy sits beneath and supplements the Exeter Vision and the draft Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy.
- 8.2 DEFRA's National Air Quality Strategy and Air Quality Action Plans set out how Government will improve and protect ambient air quality, as part of the creation of a sustainable environment.
- 8.3 The importance and profile of air quality was increased following the 2011 and 2014 enquiries into air pollution by the Environmental Audit Committee. Air quality has also made the national news as evidence of health impacts grows, particularly for ultra-fine particles (PM2.5) and as a result of court cases taken against HM Government by Client Earth for failing to comply with EU obligations.
- 8.4 The Government has challenged local authorities under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 to assess and manage their air quality. National health-based standards and objectives have been published to allow air quality to be assessed and to drive

forward management policies in order to work towards meeting the standards and objectives.

- 8.5 The Council uses a comprehensive network of 62 air pollution monitors, along with computer models, to assess air quality in Exeter. These show that air quality is generally good. There is, however, a need to tackle emissions of nitrogen dioxide associated with motor vehicles along the busiest roads into the city. This resulted in the legal designation of an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) by the Council for areas in very close proximity to some of the main routes into Exeter. In total, 232 Local Authorities have declared AQMAs. The great majority of these are the result of traffic-related emissions of nitrogen dioxide. These include five other Devon authorities and encompass areas as diverse as Cullompton, Norwich and Manchester.
- 8.6 The creation of the AQMA enables the Council to develop and focus policies designed to protect and improve Exeter's air quality. These have been formalised within a detailed Air Quality Action Plan for Exeter, which aims to reduce pollution by cutting congestion on the main routes into the city. The Council has also published a Low Emissions Strategy for the city which sets out actions that can be taken to reduce all transport emissions, including particulates, noise and carbon emissions as well as nitrogen dioxide.
- 8.7 In addition to local air quality management, the Council has numerous other statutory duties with regard to air quality such as the management of specified 'prescribed processes'. In Exeter there are currently 42 processes for which the Council or the Environment Agency has to issue permits and ensure that these are being complied with.
- 8.8 Other areas of work for the Environmental Health Services which are related to air quality issues include responding to air quality complaints and advice requests, and the provision of advice to the planning service (both forward planning and development control). Officers within Environmental Health and Licensing are also involved in programmes of work concerned with important sustainability issues such as climate change.
- 8.9 This air quality strategy provides details of all of these activities. It also gives a number of specific air quality objectives and summarises the approaches to these and the suggested methods of monitoring and reviewing the Council's progress in meeting them.
- 8.10 The air quality monitoring undertaken by the Council shows that air quality is generally very good in the city.

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

- 9.1 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?**

- 10.1 Risks to the successful implementation of the Air Quality Strategy 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 Council's Local Air Quality

Management responsibilities and changes can be made to the Air Quality Action Plan 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?**

11.1 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?**

12.1 Action to reduce local air pollution where levels exceed Government objectives is a legal duty, as is investigating and taking action to abate statutory nuisances.

**Assistant Director Environment**

**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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