

**MEMBER QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER at Place Scrutiny Committee –
13 September 2018 - Questions from Councillor Musgrave**

Response to be made by Councillor Denham Portfolio Holder City Transformation

Question 1

Is the Portfolio Holder embarrassed that Labour have broken another promise to the people of Exeter by failing to deliver an air quality action plan as required by law?

Response - No promises had been broken, and they were currently in the process of finalising a revised Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) for Exeter. The draft AQAP was published at the beginning of the year, and contained a series of proposals to ease congestion and improve air quality in the city. In February, a statutory three month public consultation was launched on the Plan and over a thousand face to face opportunities were provided in the city and provided valuable feedback. The responses were being assimilated and the results of the consultation would be publicised in due course.

Councillor Musgrave asked a supplementary question about being advised at a previous Scrutiny Committee that the results would be available for the September meeting.

Councillor Denham, said that she shared the frustration, but this was partly because the consultation had been so successful and the assimilation of the high levels of engagement had taken far longer than anticipated. It was hoped to receive the full information for November enabling a much better action plan for the city.

Question 2

How long has Exeter City Council been in breach of the requirement to have an action plan in place?

Response – Councillor Denham confirmed that following work, a revised plan would be in place shortly. DEFRA were aware of the timescales that the City Council was working towards and have not raised any concerns. The time taken to work on this, reflects the importance of the issue, the complex nature of the problems and solutions and the need to build consensus.

Councillor Musgrave asked a supplementary question, and enquired if it was correct that the City Council had been without an Action Plan since 2017.

Councillor Denham replied and stated that the Action Plan had gone beyond the life that we originally envisioned for it.

Question 3

Why isn't Exeter's illegal and widespread high levels of air pollution air quality a priority for this administration?

Response - Councillor Denham confirmed that there are not 'widespread high levels of air pollution' but there were 'hot spots' concentrated in particular areas. Levels of air pollution have been reducing in Exeter. In 2011 there were 20 monitoring locations in the city where nitrogen dioxide levels were above the objective. In 2017 there were eight. This was really good news for public health and shows that the City and County Councils have not been inactive over this period, although it was recognised there was still much to do to tackle the issue.

The issue remained a priority, which is why work had taken place with partners, both in the public and private sector to cut congestion and the resulting air pollution. The City Council

announced in March that Dr Liz O'Driscoll had been seconded as Programme Director to head up the city-wide transformation programme known as Exeter City Futures. It will address some of the big challenges facing the city, including traffic congestion. She reminded Members that Dr O'Driscoll was at the meeting to provide a presentation on Exeter City Futures, as well as a report on Air Quality. It was important that we all work together to try and improve the availability of information on air quality in the city.

Councillor Musgrave asked a supplementary question about the 66% level of one of the Council's own monitoring stations which was either on or very close to the legal limit.

Councillor Denham asked the Senior Environmental Technical Officer to assist with the response and she stated that the monitoring locations were not spread evenly around the city, but were in locations where there were higher volumes of traffic and air pollution, which provided an opportunity to capture the data.

Question 4

When can we expect an Action Plan, as required by law?

Response - It was currently anticipated that the revised AQAP would proceed through the democratic process in November.

Question 5

Does the Portfolio Holder have any specific and immediate actions or plans on the table to address the appalling lack of action and imagination on Exeter's air quality?

Response - There was no lack of action or imagination on this subject. In fact a considerable amount of work was continuing, including.

- the City Council had upgraded its continuous air pollution monitoring equipment and goes beyond what is legally required. The data gathered will feed directly into the decisions made by the city and county councils as work continues to improve air quality, tackle congestion, and ultimately improve the health of our population.
- while many councils have been cutting continuous monitoring sites because of financial constraints, Exeter's example has been praised by DEFRA, who recognise the significant investment the City Council has recently made to upgrade the equipment.
- the City Council had also been praised by DEFRA for expanding its diffusion tube network. In 2016 we added new sites to monitor the impact of housing development in key growth areas.
- in 2017, new sites were added to check for compliance with the objective at houses close to two busy junctions which had not recently been assessed. Both these sites met the required standard for nitrogen dioxide - but monitoring will continue.
- in 2018, new diffusion tubes were added to the network on off-road cycle paths so that we can highlight the difference between pollution levels here and beside busy roads.
- She anticipated that the Action Plan would be far more ambitious and it was more appropriate to take longer to get in place, a Plan that could be delivered.