

## **Minutes Extract from Executive Committee – 4 November 2025**

### **Minute No. 84 - Air Quality Annual Status report and Revision of the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)**

The Executive received the report statutory Annual Status report that had been submitted to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and contained the monitoring data from 2024, in-year summary of the actions taken to improve local air quality and future plans

The Leader moved and Councillor Williams seconded an amendment to the report recommendations to read as follows:-

Two original recommendations remain unchanged as follows

- that Executive notes the statutory annual status report;
- that Council notes the statutory annual status report;

To delete recommendations 2.2 and 2.4; and replace with

- that Executive does not amend the current Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and instead asks that the Head of Service scopes out a programme to include the physical and financial resource to revise and consult upon the Air Quality Action Plan for the current Air Quality Management Area as well as an Air Quality Strategy for the city; and
- that scrutiny on 20 November 2025 is asked to formulate ideas that they would like to be considered as part of the scoping programme, so that these can be factored into the future report when the physical and financial resource is being looked at.

The Portfolio Holder for City Management in speaking to the reason for the amendments made the following points:

- no area in Exeter currently exceeded the 40 micrograms per metre cube NO<sup>2</sup> exceedance which demonstrated that the Council was on course for improved air quality across the city;
- although one area in East Wonford Hill, previously exceeded 40 micrograms, it was now below that value, however, having an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) on a short stretch of road did not seem beneficial; and
- there needed to be a focus on continuing to improve air quality across the whole city with a focus on developing a five-year air quality strategy.

In speaking to the amendment, the Portfolio Holder for City Management read some key points of information for Members to consider:

- Air quality within the city had improved significantly over the last decade and was welcomed.
- The monitoring data gathered from the diffusion tubes for NO<sup>2</sup>, showed that no sites measured an exceedance of the annual average objective in 2024 for NO<sup>2</sup> and that exceedance was 40 micrograms per metre cubed. This was the first year when all measurements had been below the objective for NO<sup>2</sup> and marked a significant milestone in the continued improvement of the city's air quality.

- There had been no exceedances from the previous year to create an unexpected dilemma for decision makers. For a number of years now, DEFRA's annual appraisal had stated that when a number of locations had more than three consecutive years without exceedance, the authority, in light of the Act and statutory guidance, needed to review the air quality management area with a view to covering the remaining areas that contained exceedances.
- This report had correctly fulfilled that role by asking for a revision to be considered.
- There was a likelihood that one remaining location could still legally require an AQMA for three years without exceedance by the end of 2026 and the Executive were being asked to consider whether it was worth investing resources into revising the AQMA now, when there was the probability that the new order would be short-lived.
- It was important to note that there was an imperative area of concern for East Wonford Hill which still needed to be the centre of the revision and consultation of the AQMA, which the Council was still required by law to revise and consult on.
- There was, however, an opportunity to remain compliant with the legal requirements but to go further by encompassing a wider strategy for the city as a whole. Whilst there was no legal requirement to devise a strategy, due to the AQMA, it would allow the Council to lead in developing a five-year strategy that would, as one of its primary objectives, lead to consideration of revoking the current AQMA after having three successive years below the UK objective of 40 micrograms per metre cube NO<sup>2</sup> exceedance.
- Instead of pursuing the report recommendations that had been correctly presented to Members, it was proposed that the Council continue with the current AQMA and do not consult upon its revision and ask the Head of Service to scope out a programme to revise the current air quality action plan, as well as an air quality strategy.
- It was important to note that such an undertaking would have to be scoped in detail as the service responsible did not have either the staffing resources or budget to undertake this work or bring in specialist resources to conduct this work. This would allow the Head of Service the time to properly scope this work so the Council could then consider the financial requirements and implications.
- There was also a role for Strategic Scrutiny Committee, which on its meeting on the 20 November 2025, the Portfolio Holder for City Management could hear ideas on the process could work.
- This would be an opportunity, to capture the methodology for capturing citywide input from Members from across the political spectrum, rather than getting into too much detail about the content of the action plan or the strategy, as that would be for a future process.

The Leader advised Members that the notice of motion, from the Council meeting on 14 October 2025, which was referred to Scrutiny would also be included for discussion at the Strategic Scrutiny Committee on 20 November, together with a copy of the Executive Minute for this item.

The Strategic Director for Operations advised that the report brought back the annual status update which met regulatory requirements and the amendments would allow the Council to go beyond minimum requirements.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- the worst areas of the city which no longer showing exceedances were welcomed;
- in supporting the current configuration, it demonstrated progress by the Council;
- despite heavy local traffic patterns in wards such as Pinhoe, there was improved air quality away from major roads;
- the amended recommendations were welcomed and demonstrated how the Council was going beyond compliance and the importance of an air quality strategy;

- there were limitations on transport/highways powers limitations without unitary status and the Councils unitary bid could enable better transport/highways powers to reduce emissions;
- the progress made on Air Quality was commended and more regular updates from the Portfolio Holder would be welcomed; and
- would there be improved collaboration with Exeter Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC)

The Leader advised that the Managing Director of Stagecoach had stated that Exeter bus fleet would become fully electric, but how far that range would extend was to be determined.

In response to questions and points raised by Executive Members, the

Portfolio Holder for City Management advised:

- there would be more regular updates provided and likely two presentations made to Strategic Scrutiny Committee, with the first being in June 2026; and
- she was working closely with Devon County Council and over air quality action plan and was consulting with partners, such as the Director for Public Health, relevant neighbouring authorities and Highways.

Opposition group leaders raised the following points and questions:

- supported was given for the amendment and the new direction proposed;
- a concern was raised on the legality of wording implying Executive instruction to Scrutiny;
- a number of previously submitted questions had not been responded to;
- the previous report had been deferred to update the AQMA, but there appeared to be no changes other than to adoption of time scales;
- interim actions were sought until the new strategy was adopted, notably SMART actions and resources;
- enquired if the appraisal report would be signed off by Director of Public Health;
- clarity was sought on strategy framing for targets as required the Environment Act 2021 particulate matter targets; and
- long-term impacts from medium NO<sup>2</sup> exposure needed to be addressed as part of the work, including mapping of air quality against Indices of Multiple Deprivation such as in St. David's Ward.

In response to questions and points raised by Members, the Leader, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, the Head of Service - Environment and Waste and Portfolio Holder for City Management advised that:

- there were no legal issues and Scrutiny was not being directed and could reject Executive proposals;
- the Strategic Director would respond to the submitted questions, but detailed points and questions should be directed to Strategic Scrutiny Committee which would provide cross-party input for a future report back to Executive;
- there were no exceedances last year and a commitment had been made to provide regular updates and closer working with Devon County Council and specified partners; and
- the Director of Public Health's team were fully cited on the ASR and there was currently no requirement for a physical signature this year but would be a requirement for future years.

The Leader moved the amended recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RECOMMENDED** that Council note the statutory annual status report.

**RESOLVED** that Executive:

- (1) note the statutory annual status report;
- (2) does not amend the current Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and agrees that the Head of Service scope out a programme to include the physical and financial resources to revise and consult upon the Air Quality Action Plan for the current Air Quality Management Area as well as an Air Quality Strategy for the city; and
- (3) ask that the Scrutiny Committee on 20 November 2025 formulate ideas that they would like to be considered as part of the scoping programme, so that these can be factored into the future report when the physical and financial resource is being looked at.