

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTORATE OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee		
DATE:	24 November 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	16
TITLE:	Air Quality		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Councillor Page	PORTFOLIO:	Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport
SERVICE:	Regulatory Services	WARDS:	ALL
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report is being brought forward to inform members on:

- A consultation response submitted to the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The consultation seeks views on draft plans to improve air quality. The Government's primary driver for action on air quality is the impact it can have on health and the environment. The consultation sets out revised projections for when the UK's 43 zones of which Reading is one of will reach compliance with EU legislative limits for nitrogen dioxide.
- A revision to the Air Quality Action Plan 2009 which is currently out for consultation.
- An update on a recent bid for Defra grant funding.
- An update on air quality monitoring within the borough.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 To note the response to the Governments consultation and the work being undertaken to improve air quality in the Borough.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

National Context

3.1 In 2008, an EU Directive for Air Quality was brought in which required the UK to manage pollutant levels such as Nitrogen Dioxide down to set levels by 2010. The UK failed to meet the 2010 deadline with 40 of the 43 air quality zones exceeding Nitrogen Dioxide limits. Following submissions of further management plans, the EU Commission granted consent to extend the period for compliance, however the government stated that 16 zones would not meet the objective before 2020 and London would not meet the objective until 2025.

- 3.2 Following submissions by Client Earth and the European Commission to the European Court, the Supreme Court has ruled that the UK's current air quality plan does not comply with the Directive's requirement to ensure that Nitrogen dioxide levels are reduced to meet the limit values "in the shortest time possible".
- 3.3 The government must now submit revised plans to the European Commission by the end of 2015 to avoid breaching the EU Directive and having legal action taken.
- 3.4 In response to the deadline, the government has launched a consultation to seek views on its draft plan to improve air quality.

Local Context

- 3.5 The Council are under a statutory duty to regularly 'review and assess' air quality in their areas, and to determine whether or not air quality objectives are likely to be achieved. Where exceedances are considered likely, the Council must then declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and prepare an Air Quality Action Plan setting out the measures it intends to put in place in pursuit of the objectives.
- 3.6 In September 2006, the Council declared six Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). In September 2009, monitoring indicated additional areas where nitrogen dioxide levels were being exceeded. As a result the six AQMAs were revoked and replaced by a single management area which covers perceived and actual exceedances.
- 3.7 The existing Air Quality Action Plan which has been in place since 2009 was reviewed this year, as some of the actions have either been completed or superseded. The revised Air Quality Action Plan contains measures to improve air quality across Reading, specifically targeting action on the key pollutants of concern - Nitrogen Dioxide and Particulate Matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}). A paper outlining the update to the plan was presented to SEPT Committee on 15 July 2015.

4. The Proposal

- 4.1 The government published its consultation document, 'Draft plans to improve air quality in the UK - Tackling nitrogen dioxide in our towns and cities' in September 2015. The draft plan sets out individual, local and national measures:
- 4.2 Individual measures include providing up to date real time monitoring information and health advice so that individuals can plan ahead for poor air quality.
- 4.3 Local authority measures are identified as having a central role in achieving improvements in air quality, due to local knowledge and interaction with communities. The government proposes streamlining Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) reporting so that more resources can be directed at

delivering action and using the Public Health Outcomes Framework objective to reduce the percentage of mortality attributable to particulate matter (PM 2.5) to raise awareness of the impact of air pollution on public health and allow Directors of PH to prioritise action on air quality.

- 4.4 The government's projections indicate that the measures already being implemented mean that but in all but seven zones (key cities within these zones are London, Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, Derby and Southampton) compliance will be achieved by 2020.
- 4.5 The consultation paper indicates that a national programme of support, electrification of the vehicle fleet, retrofitting buses to the latest standard, combined with local assessment and targeted local action will deliver the governments projection. The paper does not identify the additional measures that are likely to be required in the remaining non-compliant areas.
- 4.6 The paper proposes a national framework for new Clean Air Zones, which would support local decision making to implement access restrictions for certain types of vehicles.
- 4.7 The government have committed £500m over the next 5 years to support the uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles (ULEV).

5. The Council's Response

- 5.1 The draft plan appears to place too much emphasis on local authorities to implement schemes to address the problem. The national role is stated to be one of support for local authorities, however little detail is provided. The government should clearly detail the level of support is available, when and to whom, so that limited local authority resources can be channelled in the right direction.
- 5.2 It is agreed that local authorities are well placed to understand local conditions and what measures could be implemented to improve air quality. As acknowledged in the zone plan, a considerable amount has been done to try to improve air quality, but there must be increased support in order to be able to deliver further changes.
- 5.3 Due to continued budget cuts, local authorities will not always have the resources available to commit to aspirational projects over and above the statutory requirements, hence the need for directed support.
- 5.4 Budget cuts mean that local authorities monitoring programmes are coming under increasing pressure to be reduced or even stopped. Without local monitoring it will not be possible to know where air quality problems exist.
- 5.5 The national plan appears heavily reliant on the vehicle emissions performance standards (EURO6) being effective. If these are not as effective in the real world as on the test bed, the projections will be inaccurate. Not only this, but other measures that are linked to emissions standards such as clean air zones

will be ineffective if based on the reductions in emissions that do not materialise.

- 5.6 Source apportionment work carried out in Reading in 2013 showed that light diesel vehicles are the highest single emitters of Nitrogen dioxide (~45%). This finding is due to the higher levels of Nitrogen dioxide emitted by diesel cars and their increasing numbers on the road; this has been replicated in numerous studies across Europe.
- 5.7 In order to be truly successful, clean air zones must tackle this source of Nitrogen dioxide, otherwise they will achieve only modest results. Unfortunately any clean air zone penalising these vehicles will be unpopular with their drivers, and may have an economic impact if this discourages people from the centre of town. These reactions mean that finding the right balance for all could prove difficult at a local level. This can be overcome if clean air zones are fully backed nationally so that they are implemented across the board at locations where Nitrogen dioxide is being exceeded.
- 5.8 The closing date for responses to the consultation was 6 November 2015.

6. Update to the Air Quality Action Plan 2009.

- 6.1 The Air Quality Action Plan has been updated to reflect the current position. The plan is currently out for consultation with statutory consultees. Should there be any significant comments or revisions required a further report will be submitted to members

7. A bid for Air Quality Grant Funding

- 7.1 A bid was submitted for grant funding in October 2015. The main aim of the bid is to reduce the impact of Council vehicles on pollution in and around Reading's Air Quality Management Area by enabling the early adoption of electric vehicles for use on the Council fleet.
- 7.2 Due to the cost of installing the necessary charging infrastructure and the comparatively high cost of electric vehicles, although desirable, to date it has not been considered financially viable to bring electric vehicles onto the Council fleet.
- 7.3 This project plans to use this grant funding opportunity to install four electric vehicle charging points on public sector estate within Reading for use with Council fleet vehicles. The provision of this infrastructure will support the local authority to integrate electric vehicles into its fleet as appropriate opportunities and economies arise and enable the transition to electric vehicle adoption in accordance with the Council's vehicle replacement programme.
- 7.4 It is hoped we will receive confirmation of whether we have made a successful bid in December.

8 Changes to Air Quality Monitoring within the Borough

8.1 DEFRA have identified the need for additional Nitrogen Oxide and particulate matter (PM10) monitors in the Reading area. They have requested that one of the existing sites is moved to London Road to become affiliated with their network. The plan is to relocate the air quality monitoring station on Kings Road to the new location on London Road.

8.2 DEFRA have agreed to cover all costs involved in the relocation process, they will also carry out the data management for the site, benefitting the Council by reducing the annual cost of running the site. It is hoped to carry out the move at the turn of the year so that there is a full year's data from the old site.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

9.1 The delivery of the Air Quality Action Plan helps to deliver the Corporate Plan Service Priority: Keeping the town clean, safe green and active. Within which it is a key action to narrow the gap by reducing particulate matter mortality to the national average of 5.3%.

10. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

10.1 The Air Quality action plan is currently out to statutory consultation and available on the website for comment.

11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

11.1 No equality impact is required as part of this report.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The UK is failing to meet EU limit values for nitrogen dioxide. This has led to the EU commencing infringement proceedings. If fined for failing to meet these targets, the fines can potentially be handed down to local authorities if they are unable to demonstrate that they have taken the appropriate action. The Localism Act contains reserve powers to enable the Government to passport EU fines to local authorities and public bodies.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The Air Quality Action Plan combines actions from different services for which in the main capital grants have been secured to deliver the outcomes.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Air quality action plan
- Plan showing the location of the re-sited air quality monitoring station.