

Report to Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

4 March 2021

Subject:	Sandwell's Air Quality Action Plan
Director:	Director of Public Health, Lisa McNally
Contact Officer:	Consultant in Public Health, Paul Fisher paul_fisher@sandwell.gov.uk Healthy Urban Development Officer, Andy Thorpe, andy_thorpe@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 To consider and comment on the following recommendations in the report to Cabinet about Sandwell's Air Quality Action Plan:

- That the Cabinet recommend the Council to approve Sandwell's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) 2020-2025.
- That the Director of Public Health be authorised to address air quality according to the actions outlined in the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) following approval by the Council.





2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 Tackling air pollution is one of Sandwell Council's health priorities and the AQAP outlines the actions delivered between 2020 and 2025 to reduce concentrations of air pollutants and exposure to them.





- 2.2 Once approved, the programme of work outlined in the AQAP will also help to reduce carbon emissions to a level which will meet Sandwell's 2030 and 2041 targets as set out in the recently adopted Climate Change Strategy and associated action plan. Many of the actions to reduce air pollution can also result in lower carbon emissions. The impacts of climate change are likely to be extensive and will detrimentally affect poorer people, therefore action must be taken to reduce that impact and ensure the future prosperity and equality of Sandwell's residents.
- 2.3 The wide-ranging actions required to tackle the impacts of air quality and climate change will have significant resource implications for the Council, therefore funding and likely sources of income will be sought to assist.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan? (select relevant category and inc narrative how deliver)

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>Young children are at particular risk of emissions in the borough, both short-term (air quality) and longer-term (climate change).</p>
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <p>Air pollution and climate change are key threats to the health of our population and a driver of health inequalities. Addressing air pollution and climate change will reduce health inequalities and increase the perception of Sandwell as a clean, safe borough.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>Addressing air pollution will contribute towards adaptation and resilience to the impacts of climate change.</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</p>



	Reduced emissions from Sandwell's new and existing housing stock will help to address air pollution, climate change and fuel poverty problems.
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p> <p>Sandwell's reputation will be increasingly linked to its action on climate change and clean air, which will be important for attracting investment in green jobs.</p>
	<p>A connected and accessible Sandwell</p> <p>Improved, cleaner public transport will have a significant impact on reducing air pollution and carbon emissions.</p> <p>Developing more walkable and cyclable places will reduce air pollution and carbon emissions, producing more desirable places to live.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The AQAP is produced as part of the Council's statutory duty to work towards Air Quality Strategy (AQS) objectives as required by The Environment Act 1995 (Part IV) and to meet the requirements of the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) statutory process.
- 4.2 Air pollution has been a longstanding problem in Sandwell and in 2005 the Council declared a borough wide Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). At that time the objective for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) was being exceeded in 22 separate locations. The Council's monitoring of NO₂ concentrations shows that they continue to exceed the annual mean objective in 7 locations with no significant evidence of a downward trend during the past five years.
- 4.3 Screening exercises in 2018 were also utilised to validate existing hot spots for NO₂ and was also used to identify other areas where NO₂ levels might rise above annual mean objectives.



- 4.4 Projects delivered through the last AQAP included:
- Promoting health initiatives that support sustainable transport and behavioural change
 - Traffic management and highway improvements
 - Implementation of guidance and policy working with other key stakeholders
 - Improving understanding of pollutant behaviour
 - Reviewing the Council's impact on air quality.
- 4.5 The Council's approach to tackling air quality has now become integrated with the Council's Climate Change Strategy because the emissions that pollute the air and those that warm the planet have common sources; vehicles, buildings, power generation and industry.

The Current Position

- 4.6 The principal source of air pollution in Sandwell is vehicle exhaust emissions, particularly from diesel engines. The Council's aims are to:
- Reduce the overall health impacts and burdens of poor air quality
 - Achieve the national air quality NO₂ annual mean objective across the borough in the shortest possible time frame
 - Reduce concentrations of particulate matter emissions (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} inhalable particles) to protect human health.
- 4.7 Seven priority actions have been established to support these aims:
1. Develop specific measures with local communities to reduce NO₂ hotspots.
 2. Promote public transport, walking, cycling and switching to zero emission vehicles.
 3. Review the Council's impact on air quality including Council fleet and employee vehicles.
 4. Support and encourage taxi drivers to switch to low emission vehicles.
 5. Apply existing and adapt new planning development policies to support air quality improvements.



6. Publicity campaigns to encourage behavioural change around physical health and increasing use of low emission vehicles.
7. Partnership working with Birmingham City Council to minimise potential negative impact of the Clean Air Zone.

Consultation

- 4.8 A consultation on the Climate Change Strategy was carried out in parallel with the draft AQAP for six weeks from 20 January to 15 March 2020. This formed the local consultation for the AQAP. A second period of consultation for the AQAP was carried out between 7 July and 1 September 2020. This formed the statutory consultation of key stakeholders and interest groups which is required when local authorities are either preparing or revising their AQAP.
- 4.9 The former Air Quality Working Group has become the Climate Change Working Group enabling focus on a wider agenda. A Members' Steering Group for Climate Change also meets regularly.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Council has a statutory duty to have an AQAP so there are no alternative options. (There is not the same requirement for a Climate Change Strategy but given the importance of the situation there also does not seem an alternative approach to having adopted it.)

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>Financial, staffing, land/building implications</p> <p>No specific budget has been identified for the implementation of AQAP measures requiring additional funding, but these will be the subject of future reports to Cabinet. Likely sources of funding and income will also be sought to assist.</p> <p>Council resources which might be dedicated to funding climate change interventions, needed to achieve the required step change in behaviour, will in most cases help to address</p>
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	air quality problems. Work has begun to identify how the Climate Change Strategy can be funded.
Legal and Governance:	<p>Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions</p> <p>The AQAP is produced as part of the Council's statutory duty to work towards Air Quality Strategy (AQS) objectives as required by The Environment Act 1995 (Part IV) and to meet the requirements of the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) statutory process. The Council is also required to update the air quality action plan and implement it as part of these statutory duties.</p>
Risk:	<p>Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications</p> <p>The Environment Bill, which is currently progressing through Parliament, is likely to set lower thresholds for particulate matter emissions (referred to as pm2.5) because of the health risks associated with this pollution entering the bloodstream through the lungs and therefore being taken to all bodily organs. This could result in the need to apply restrictions which will reduce the exposure of people to such pollution and might therefore have implications for new development schemes.</p> <p>The Council is required to update the air quality action plan and implement it as part of its statutory duties. The risk is not taking any action and allowing mortality rates to increase due to poor air quality.</p> <p>The AQAP would be supported by a risk register to identify and assess the key risks that will need to be managed in order to ensure the successful delivery of the AQAP. This would also assist in the allocation of finite resources to the AQAP.</p> <p>Risks would include matters such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programme/project governance arrangements 2. Financial resources to deliver the AQAP actions



	<p>3. Performance and assurance framework to assess effectiveness of actions included in the AQAP</p> <p>4. Communication and stakeholder buy-in of the AQAP</p> <p>5. Alignment of the AQAP to other council documents and processes, eg procurement rules, cabinet reports, planning policies, office accommodation plan, etc.</p>
Equality:	<p>Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments</p> <p>The worst air pollution levels were seen in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. Elderly, young and deprived people are more vulnerable to the effects of air pollution.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities</p> <p>Air pollution is associated with a number of adverse health impacts. It is recognised as a contributing factor in the onset of heart disease and cancer, plus recent research has suggested links between air quality and both cognitive and sight health. Additionally, air pollution particularly affects the most vulnerable in society: children and older people, and those with heart and lung conditions. There is also a strong correlation with equality issues, because areas with poor air quality are also often the less affluent areas.</p> <p>The annual health cost to society of the impacts of particulate matter alone in the UK is estimated to be around £16 billion. Sandwell Council is committed to reducing the exposure of people to poor air quality in order to improve health.</p>
Social Value	<p>Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people)</p> <p>In the long term, proactive intervention taken now to improve air quality should reduce the burden on the NHS and local health care services and help ensure health equality.</p>



7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Sandwell's Air Quality Action Plan 2020-25
Appendix 2: Sandwell's Climate Change Strategy 2020-41

8. Background Papers

None

Lisa McNally
Director of Public Health
lisa_mcnally@sandwell.gov.uk

Paul Fisher
Consultant in Public Health
paul_fisher@sandwell.gov.uk

Andy Thorpe
Healthy Urban Development Officer
andy_thorpe@sandwell.gov.uk

