

# Report to Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**30 September 2021**

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| <b>Subject:</b>         | Sandwell's Air Quality Action Plan – Progress Report  |
| <b>Director:</b>        | Director of Public Health, Lisa McNally   |
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## 1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To consider and comment on the following recommendations:
- 1.2 That the Board notes the progress made regarding Sandwell Council's approved Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) 2020-2025 since the previous report to the Board on 25 March 2021.
- 1.3 To suggest further courses of action to improve air quality that the Director of Public Health could explore for future updates to the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP).

## 2. Reasons for Recommendations



- 2.1 Following approval of the AQAP by the Council on 23 March 2021, it was requested at the meeting of the Economy, Skills, Transport and







Environment Scrutiny Board meeting on 25 March 2021 that a progress update on the AQAP should be provided to the Board in 6 months' time.

- 2.2 Tackling air pollution is one of Sandwell Council's health priorities and the AQAP outlines the actions which will help to reduce concentrations of air pollutants and exposure to them. Further actions could also be implemented as methods of how to tackle air quality problems are developed. Much of the improvement will result from behaviour changes with some assistance from changes in technology.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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?

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|  | <p><b>Best start in life for children and young people</b></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><b>People live well and age well</b></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> |



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|   | <p><b>Strong resilient communities</b></p> <p>Addressing air pollution will contribute towards adaptation and resilience to the impacts of climate change.</p>  |
|  | <p><b>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</b></p> <p>Reduced emissions from Sandwell’s new and existing housing stock will help to address air pollution, climate change and fuel poverty problems.</p>  |
|  | <p><b>A strong and inclusive economy</b></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><b>A connected and accessible Sandwell</b></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

### Background

- 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 (NO<sub>2</sub>) was being exceeded in 22 separate locations. The Council’s monitoring of NO<sub>2</sub> 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 NO<sub>2</sub> and was also used to identify other areas where NO<sub>2</sub> 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 NO<sub>2</sub> air pollution in Sandwell is vehicle exhaust emissions. The Council's aims are to:

- Reduce the overall health impacts and burdens of poor air quality
- Achieve the national air quality NO<sub>2</sub> annual mean objective across the borough in the shortest possible time frame
- Also reduce concentrations of particulate matter emissions (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> 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 NO<sub>2</sub> 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.

## 5. Progress since March 2021

5.1 Since the adoption of the AQAP by the Council on 23 March 2021 and its subsequent acceptance by DEFRA's Local Air Quality Management team, a number of actions have taken place since the last report to the Board. These can be grouped as follows:

- Monitoring and reporting
- Specific projects
- Promotional activities
- Briefing for elected members.

### Monitoring and reporting

5.2 Certain air pollutants are routinely monitored to assess levels of pollution across Sandwell. The monitoring strategy has been developed and adapted over the years to prioritise pollutants which have been identified to have the highest risk of breaching the air quality objectives. The following aspects of the monitoring programme have been completed over the last six months:

- The continuous monitoring of nitrogen dioxide levels across Sandwell using diffusion tubes is ongoing and a full dataset is being achieved.
- Equipment at four of the five permanent air monitoring stations in Sandwell have been renewed and modernised to enable more accurate and reliable continuous monitoring of pollution levels.



- Low cost air quality monitors (Zephyrs) which are capable of monitoring various types of air pollution (nitrogen dioxide - NO<sub>2</sub>, nitric oxide - NO, ozone - O<sub>3</sub> and particulate matter - PM<sub>1</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>) have been purchased to enable air quality projects to take place at specific locations. So far 13 of the planned 21 monitors are in location, eight are located next to faith centres as part of the project described below in paragraph 5.4. Two monitors have been located at potential air pollution hotspots in Smethwick and another in Wednesbury. One monitor has also been co-located next to a permanent monitoring station site for calibration purposes.
- Air pollution monitoring data from across Sandwell is published in an Annual Status Report (ASR) which is submitted to DEFRA. The ASR also outlines the actions being taken to improve air quality. The ASR 2021, which reports on air quality in 2020 is available on the Council's website.

### **Specific projects**

- 5.3 Work is ongoing declare the whole of Sandwell as a Smoke Control Area (SCA), which will revoke and replace the existing 51 SCAs. SCAs are designed to reduce the emission of smoke from chimneys by requiring the use of either authorised fuel or by using DEFRA “exempt appliances”, for example certain burners and stoves. Unauthorised fuel must not be used in a smoke control area unless it is used in an exempt appliance. Sandwell’s current 51 separate SCAs means that only some parts of the borough are protected against smoke emissions, whilst many properties in the Borough can legally burn unauthorised fuels (i.e. wood and coal) and use non-exempted appliances. The proposed new single SCA will address this inequality by ensuring that all premises in Sandwell fall under the requirements of a SCA. The Health and ASC Scrutiny Board meeting on 13 September 2021 recommended approval for the proposed single SCA, with the next step being to take the proposal to Cabinet for approval on 20 October 2021.
- 5.4 Sandwell Council was awarded Air Quality Grant funding by DEFRA to pursue a project designed to improve and increase awareness of air



quality issues by engaging with faith leaders and their communities across the borough. The aim is to bring about behavioural change to improve the health of the participants and their local communities. Since Sandwell has some of the largest and well-attended faith centres in the country there's an opportunity for them to lead the way towards community-driven, community-designed improvements in air quality. The two years project involves eight faith centres in year one followed by another eight centres in year two. Engagement with faith centres has been successful, and air quality monitoring units and display equipment has been located at each centre. Creation of the bespoke web-based dashboard to report air quality data in real-time on the display equipment is almost complete. Ongoing support will be given to each centre to ensure that they receive adequate help and advice and that interest in the project is maintained through the year. At the end of the first 12 months, the faith centres will be asked to produce a report about their intervention methods, and to attend an air quality conference to discuss intervention methods with other faith centres.

- 5.5 Sandwell Council's emissions from fleet vehicles and business mileage are being addressed with assistance from the Energy Saving Trust (EST), although progress has been slow because of the limited resources that EST can make available to local authorities. Many local authorities, including Sandwell Council, now have a Climate Change Strategy whose action plans include the need to electrify their fleets and reduce business mileage by older more polluting cars, which means there has been great demand for the EST's assistance. A report from the EST will however be commissioned which will review the Council's fleet, a process requiring data on vehicle age, engine types and renewal dates, and determine an electrification strategy. Business mileage issues have been studied by Sandwell Council in the recent past, although it pre-dates the ongoing coronavirus pandemic which has changed many of the Council's working practices. This aspect is therefore on-hold until there is more certainty about working practices.

- 5.6 The most effective ways to influence and improve low and ultra-low emission vehicle use in Sandwell's taxi fleet are being explored. In an



area of high deprivation like Sandwell, there are individual financial issues surrounding the need to bring about a cleaner taxi fleet. Issues surrounding better awareness of electric vehicles, their usefulness as taxis and the provision of electric vehicle charging points (EVCP) could in time be overcome, but taxi owners operating with small profit margins will find it difficult or impossible to switch to less polluting vehicles or electric vehicles. A survey is being devised by the Energy Saving Trust (EST) which aims to gauge opinions about electric vehicles (EV) from taxi and private hire drivers. The responses would help to inform taxi policy and support EV infrastructure decisions. A further discussion of how to progress this area of work is in progress with Taxi Licensing colleagues.

- 5.7 In Sandwell the Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) Strategy is being coordinated on behalf of Black Country Transport by colleagues from Transportation Planning. The Strategy aims to accelerate the uptake of ULEVs across the area in anticipation of a nationwide 2030 ban on the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles. Work is currently concentrating on a bid for an on-street residential charging scheme. The provision of public electric vehicle charging points (EVCP) is largely regarded as the main barrier to electric vehicle uptake in Sandwell and indeed elsewhere. EVCPs at new residential and commercial developments have been required through the Planning process as conditions for some years, using the Black Country Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as the basis for this requirement. Consultation responses for planning applications which request EVCPs to be conditioned are made as appropriate.

### **Promotional activities**

- 5.8 Clean Air Day is the UK's largest air pollution campaign which aims to engage people through and the media. This year Clean Air Day took place on 17 June 2021 and benefitted from national promotional work. In previous years Sandwell Council has prepared media releases and in future, when not constrained by the coronavirus pandemic, aims to hold promotional events. Action this year included the creation of a Teams/Zoom background showing the Clean Air Day logo that staff





could use in meetings on the day and encouragement to share on social media, using the #CleanAirDay hashtag. Staff were also encouraged to learn more about electric cars by signing-up for one of two “Go Electric!” sessions provided by the Energy Saving Trust.

5.9 Air quality awareness work is aligned to the Council’s Climate Change Strategy, therefore Sandwell’s “Great Big Green Week”, held between 18 September and 26th September 2021, helps to progress awareness and action for both aspects. Examples of such activities in this week are litter picks in the local area, support for application for free tree planting packs and an educational webinar about COP26.

5.10 Sustainable Travel awareness is ongoing through the Council’s collaboration with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) in relation to the Government funded Active Travel Fund (ATF) project. Engagement with schools and workplaces near to cycling and walking infrastructure planned for a number of locations in Sandwell is ongoing. The Sandwell cycling network is also being improved, with a section parallel to Smethwick High Street on Tollhouse Way having recently been completed, and the West Midlands bike share scheme now being implemented in Sandwell. The promotion of car sharing using the Council’s carsharesandwell.com website is currently on-hold because of the pandemic, but it is an important tool for reducing car use and widening the transport choices for people, potentially enabling people to have better access to job opportunities. The e-scooter trial in West Bromwich is ongoing, although the impact on car use reduction is yet unknown. Walking continues to be promoted through the national “Go Jauntly” web application which holds information for a number of walking routes in Sandwell.

5.11 During the summer of 2021 residents, businesses and young people were invited to complete separate surveys on the proposal to extend Sandwell’s Smoke Control Area (SCA) across the whole borough. The aim was to gain a greater understanding of the extent of public support for the changes described in paragraph 5.3. If agreed by Cabinet in October, this will be followed-up with a formal public consultation which



will also give the public the right to object. The results from the surveys this summer have demonstrated that the public are broadly in favour of the proposed change to a single SCA covering the whole borough as well as a clear majority of respondents stating that they either agree or strongly agree that improving air quality should be a priority for Sandwell Council.

### **Briefing for elected members**

5.12 Member briefing sessions, Scrutiny Board meetings and workshops have been held in the last few months which have helped to increase awareness of air quality issues.

- **25 March 2021** - Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board - The AQAP was presented for discussion.
- **29 March 2021** - Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board - The AQAP was presented for discussion.
- **6 July 2021** - Cllr Suzanne Hartwell, Cabinet Member for Adults, Social Care and Health, was briefed on air quality matters.
- **8 July 2021** - Climate Change Awareness Session for Members - General climate change issues and links with air quality.
- **31 August 2021** - Councillor Workshop on the proposals for Sandwell's single Smoke Control Area
- **9 September 2021** - Member Education Session on air pollution.
- **13 September 2021** - Health and ASC Scrutiny Board – Sandwell's single Smoke Control Area proposals were recommended for approval.
- **14 September 2021** - Cllr Ahmad Bostan, Cabinet Member for Environment, briefing session on Sandwell's proposals for a single Smoke Control Area.

## **6. Alternative Options**

6.1 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.)



## 7. Implications

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| <p><b>Resources:</b></p>            | <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 air quality problems. Work has begun to identify how the Climate Change Strategy can be funded.</p>   |
| <p><b>Legal and Governance:</b></p> | <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>  |
| <p><b>Risk:</b></p>                 | <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 significant health risks associated with this ultrafine dust. There is no safe level for PM2.5 because once it enters the bloodstream through the lungs it can travel to all internal organs causing a range of health conditions such as strokes, heart disease and lung cancer. 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> |



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|                                     | <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"> <li>1. Programme/project governance arrangements</li> <li>2. Financial resources to deliver the AQAP actions</li> <li>3. Performance and assurance framework to assess effectiveness of actions included in the AQAP</li> <li>4. Communication and stakeholder buy-in of the AQAP</li> <li>5. Alignment of the AQAP to other council documents and processes, e.g procurement rules, cabinet reports, planning policies, office accommodation plan, etc.</li> </ol> |
| <p><b>Equality:</b></p>             | <p>Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments</p> <p>The worst air pollution levels are seen in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. Elderly, young and deprived people are more vulnerable to the effects of air pollution.</p>  |
| <p><b>Health and Wellbeing:</b></p> | <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 function 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</p>   |



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|                     | <p>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> |
| <b>Social Value</b> | <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>  |

## 8. Appendices

Appendix A: Sandwell's Air Quality Action Plan 2020-25

Appendix B: Sandwell's Climate Change Strategy 2020-41

## 9. Background Papers

Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy:

[https://consultation.wolverhampton.gov.uk/bct/bct-ulev-strategy/user\\_uploads/black-country-ulev-strategy-2020.pdf](https://consultation.wolverhampton.gov.uk/bct/bct-ulev-strategy/user_uploads/black-country-ulev-strategy-2020.pdf)

[Primary Particulate Matter - Clean Air Strategy 2019](#)

Sandwell Annual Status Report for Air Quality Reporting on 2020

[https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200274/pollution/485/air\\_quality](https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200274/pollution/485/air_quality)

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