

Council – 17 September 2018

Notice of motion - Air Quality in Walsall

I set out below a notice of motion to Council on 17 September 2018 from Councillors Shires, S. Coughlan, D. Coughlan, Ward, Jeavons, Burley, Chambers, Jukes, Robertson, Underhill, Hussain and Nawaz as detailed below:

“This Council recognises that clean air has made a huge contribution to improving the health of people in the Borough over the last thirty or forty years.

This Council notes that vehicle emissions affect the cleanliness of the air in the Borough.

The Council further notes that an estimated 40,000 people die each year in the UK as a result of poor air quality, those with asthma or lung problems being particularly affected.

Council notes that significant progress has been made in prioritising pedestrian access, cycling routes and public transport improvements in recent years.

Council is concerned however, that despite these and other planned improvements, poor air quality is a growing issue in some hotspots in the Borough.

Council calls on the Cabinet to develop plans to promote improvements to air quality in the Borough.

Council also calls on Government to take its responsibilities for improving air quality seriously, including for example, improving “pinch points” on major strategic roads that cause congestion, and investing in transferring the movement of freight from road to rail wherever possible.”

Background

Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK and is mainly associated with vehicle emissions. It is known to have more severe effects on vulnerable groups, notably the elderly, children and people already suffering from pre-existing health conditions (for example respiratory and cardiovascular conditions).

Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) is a gas produced by reaction of nitrogen and oxygen in the combustion processes from vehicles; Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) pollutes the air locally mainly as a result of road traffic and energy production.

Monitoring and taking steps to rectify poor air quality is a statutory function for the Council and is an important focus which covers multiple service areas. It is however recognised that the trend in air quality sees regular improvements year on year largely due to changes in the vehicle fleet composition and the introduction of cleaner technology. The Council is able to verify this by its on-going continuous monitoring and modelling work that is conducted as part of its statutory functions and reported data by Government. The Councils work is utilised in considering plans and intervention where necessary to bring forward improvements in ‘hotspot’ areas.

Along with 33 other local authorities including Dudley MBC, Sandwell MBC, Wolverhampton CC, the Council was issued a Ministerial Direction on 23 March 2018. This direction required the Council to consider intervention measures that could bring forward a reduction in NO₂ concentrations on identified road links in the shortest possible time. As a result the Council was required to submit a Targeted Feasibility Study by 31 July 2018.

Of four road links identified by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra's) Joint Air Quality Unit (under the Ministerial Direction) as being of concern, two now remain which include:

- A454 west of Junction 10 M6;
- A454 Wolverhampton Road at the junction of A4148 Pleck Road into Blue Lane West to Court Way;

The A454 Wolverhampton Road at the junction of A4148 Pleck Road into Blue Lane West to Court Way has been challenged by the Council following preparation of local data which demonstrates compliance.

In addition to the Ministerial Direction, Government had previously identified the A454 Black Country Route west of junction 10 M6 to the borough boundary with Wolverhampton as having failing air quality up to 2021.

Within Walsall, the M6 motorway corridor and intersecting roads have in recent years been consistently identified as exceeding the National Air Quality Objective/EU Limit Value. The introduction of 'Smart' Motorways has intended to bring about improvements in air quality through the use of active traffic management. In addition, the Council in partnership with Highways England are currently in the design and preparation phase of delivering the M6 Junction 10 Improvement scheme.

In addition to the above, measures to encourage modal shift to sustainable modes (public transport, walking and cycling) are part of an overall approach to addressing traffic congestion and poor air quality in the Borough, as set out in the Walsall Transport Strategy and the West Midlands 'Movement for Growth' strategy. A number of strategic projects are being pursued with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) including: -

- A34 SPRINT (bus rapid transit) between Walsall town centre and Birmingham city centre;
- New rail stations at Willenhall, Darlaston and Aldridge with associated new train services;
- Higher-frequency train services between Walsall Station and Birmingham New Street Station post-delivery of HS2 Phase 1 in 2026;
- Town Centre Interchange to replace the on-street bus interchange at Bradford Place;
- Longer-term options to re-open other disused rail lines in the Borough to heavy rail, Tram-Train or Metro.

The Council is also actively pursuing proposals to improve key road corridors, including the A454 Walsall – Wolverhampton corridor (in conjunction with Wolverhampton City Council) and the A461 Walsall – Shire Oak corridor.

Members will be aware of the Council's 2009 Air Quality Action Plan; this Plan will be updated as required to reflect the air quality improvements in Walsall while drawing on recent Ministerial Direction (and subsequent Study) issued to the Council in March 2018.

Members of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee have, at their September meeting, been provided with a detailed update and overview of air quality in Walsall.

The Committee were provided details of the Targeted Feasibility Study that was submitted to Defra in July. In addition, the Committee received an update on Birmingham City Council's Clean Air Zone (CAZ) proposals that are designed to tackle poor air quality in the city centre along with the Black Country response to the consultation.

Economy and Environment Scrutiny will discuss the matter at its meeting on 11 September 2018.

Next Steps

Actions and recommendations arising for the Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Health & Wellbeing Board December meeting with a follow up report taken to the January meeting of Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee as appropriate.

Where there are further corporate implications associated with air quality measures, these will be presented to Council at their February 2019 meeting.

The Air Quality Action Plan will be updated during the course of 2019.

Simon Neilson
Executive Director

4 September 2018