

11 September 2018

Air Quality in Walsall

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor L Harrison – Clean and Green.
Councillor A Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Executive Summary:

The Chair of Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested an update on air quality and pollution effecting Walsall and the Wider Black Country. This report is intended to provide an overview of the following:-

- Reasons for poor air quality;
- Birmingham Clean Air Zone Proposals;
- Targeted feasibility zone around transportation;
- West Midlands Low Emissions Town and Cities Programme;
- Wider Strategic Transportation with Public Health approaches.

Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. It is known to have more severe effects on vulnerable groups, for example the elderly, children and people already suffering from pre-existing health conditions (notably respiratory and cardiovascular conditions). Such impacts are primarily centred on nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and fine particles (expressed as a PM_{2.5} fraction). Only nitrogen dioxide has a compliance limit in the form of a numerical airborne concentration in England; even achieving this does not remove the health burden, as the World Health Organisation have declared that there is no safe limit for PM_{2.5}.

Redressing poor air quality is a statutory function for the Council, and is an important focus that spans multiple service areas. This report is intended to provide Members with an overview of air quality and its implications for Walsall, including the repercussions of ClientEarth's third successful challenge to Government concerning the inadequacies of the (national) Air Quality Plan for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂).

A Ministerial Direction has been issued to Walsall Council that required preparation of a Targeted Feasibility Study (TFS) on bringing forward measures to reduce levels of NO₂. This report provides details on the combined Black Country TFS submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). In addition, this report will provide Members with an update on the consultation submission to Birmingham City Council's Clean Air Zone (CAZ) proposals.

Members will be provided with an update on how the Council continues to safeguard improvements in air quality and the current challenges the Council faces in tackling air pollution.

Reason for scrutiny:

The Chair of the Committee has requested an update on how air quality can be improved in Walsall and the current challenges tackling air pollution. The Chair has also asked for an update on the Clean Air Zone proposals for Birmingham with indications on how this may impact on Walsall and the wider Black Country.

A key to addressing the concerns is the need for continued partnership working on air quality between Black Country councils and the West Midlands Combined Authority, the updating of Good Practice Air Quality Guidance produced by the West Midlands Low Emissions Towns and Cities Programme and the adoption of the Proposed Low Emissions Vehicle Strategy when revised.

Recommendations:

- 1. That, the Committee note the report and subject to comments raised by Members of the Committee consider whether to make any recommendations;**
- 2. That, the Committee support the application of Public Health approaches for sustainable travel.**

1. Report

Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂)

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

NO₂ exceedances have primarily arisen in regard to major arterial roads that form part of the West Midlands Key Route Network, along with motorways and trunk roads for which the Highways Agency has responsibility. 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.

In health impact terms, the mechanism by which NO₂ acts is most probably related to its properties as an oxidising agent that can damage cell membranes and proteins. At relatively high concentrations NO₂ causes acute inflammation of the airways. In addition, short-term exposure can affect the immune cells of the airways in a manner that might predispose people to an increased risk of respiratory infections.

Studies on human populations indicate that long-term exposure to NO₂ may decrease lung function and increase the risk of respiratory symptoms, such as acute bronchitis, cough and phlegm, particularly in children. Some studies have shown associations between NO₂ exposure and mortality.

Government has 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. Consequently, discussion with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) took place in 2017 and it was agreed that the introduction of a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) was not suitable. Defra officials at this time were unaware of the joint Walsall / Highways England proposed scheme to re-construct M6 Junction 10 to replace the existing over-bridges and improve junction capacity - which has a bearing on air quality in this locality.

Of four road links identified by Defra's Joint Air Quality Unit as being of concern, two now remain, comprising the A454 west of junction 10 M6, along with the A454 Wolverhampton Road at the junction of A4148 Pleck Road into Blue Lane West to Court Way, the latter of which has been challenged by the Council. These have been addressed in the Technical Feasibility Study submission to Defra.

Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5})

Particulate matter (PM) is a term used to describe the mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets in the air, which can be either man-made or naturally occurring. PM varies in size (i.e. diameter or width of the particle). PM_{2.5} (or 'Fine Particles') generally refers to the mass per cubic metre of particles in air with a size (diameter) generally less than and up to 2.5 micrometres (µm), which is a convenient simplification of the correct technical description.

Inhalation of particulate pollution can have adverse health impacts, and there is understood to be no safe threshold for PM_{2.5} below which adverse effects would not be anticipated. The biggest impact on public health is understood to be from long-term

exposure to PM_{2.5}, which increases the age-specific mortality risk, particularly from cardiovascular causes. Exposure to high concentrations during short-term pollution episodes can also exacerbate lung and heart conditions, significantly affecting quality of life and increasing deaths and hospital admissions.

A relatively new programme of PM_{2.5} monitoring that is now into its third year arose through a collaboration between Public Health Walsall and Pollution Control to gain data and information on PM_{2.5}. This has not previously been available at a local level, and it serves to aid production of a verified PM_{2.5} concentrations model, identify pollution 'hotspots' and examine in relation to health impacts dependent upon geographical location and other related factors, set against socio-demographic considerations and health data from the CCG. This encompasses the incidence of respiratory, cardio-vascular and other diseases, with a view to prioritising interventions where possible and the allocation of public health resources within the community.

Public Health Outcomes Framework Indicator 3.01 (Health Protection) concerns the fraction of all-cause adult mortality attributable to long-term exposure to current levels of anthropogenic particulate air pollution measured as PM_{2.5}. The most recent reported information for this Indicator shows that the adult mortality in Walsall is higher than the national average for England, and is also higher than reported values for Dudley, Wolverhampton and Solihull. Inclusion of this indicator in the Public Health Outcomes Framework is to enable Directors of Public Health to prioritise action on air quality in their local area to help reduce the health burden from air pollution.

Birmingham Clean Air Zone

As result of on-going failure to meet the National Air Quality Objective / EU Air Quality Limit Value for NO₂, Birmingham City Council is one of five city councils (along with Leeds, Nottingham, Derby and Southampton) that have been required by Government to implement a Clean Air Zone. This has been identified in Government's updated 2017 National Air Quality Plan and it is required that compliance is achieved as soon as possible.

A Clean Air Zone defines an area where targeted action is taken to improve air quality; resources are prioritised and coordinated in order to shape the urban environment in a way that delivers improved health benefits and supports economic growth. Clean Air Zones aim to address all sources of pollution using a range of measures at a given location or within a specified area, and may be tailored to a given source.

Birmingham City Council appointed consultants to model and forecast traffic-associated NO₂ and the effects of intervention scenarios with regard to central Birmingham within the city ring-road. Without intervention it has been forecast that Birmingham will not achieve compliance with the National Air Quality Objective / EU Air Quality Limit Value for NO₂.

Birmingham City Council recognise that a charging Clean Air Zone alone may not be sufficient to achieve compliance and that in order to mitigate displacement of air quality problems to other areas there is a principle need for a reduction in vehicle demand - particularly in respect of private cars. The proposed Clean Air Zone is all roads within the A4540 Middleway Ring Road as shown in Figure 1.

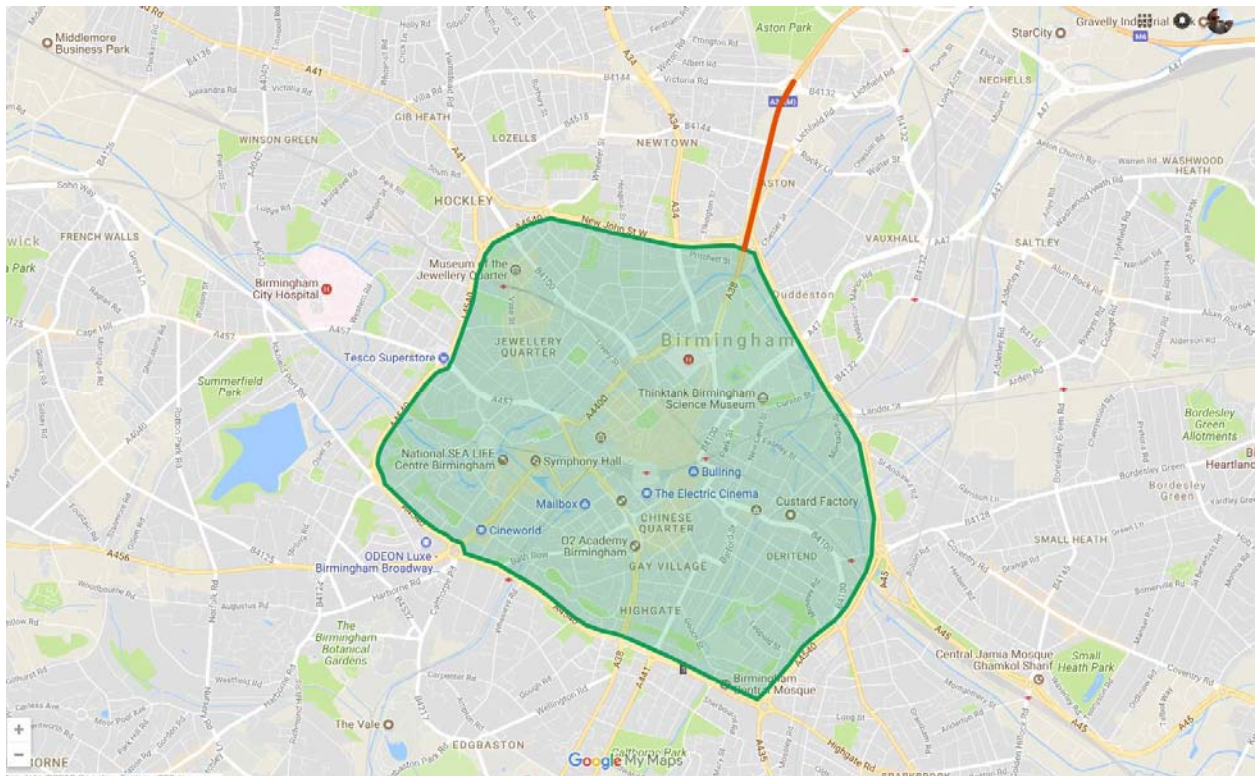


Figure 1: Clear Air Zone Proposals via Google Maps™

It is envisaged that Birmingham will implement the proposed Clean Air Zone by the end of 2019. Government expects the Clean Air Zone will impose charges on certain classes of vehicle entering the zone and has set out in respect of vehicles to which they apply:

- Class A - Buses, coaches, taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs)
- Class B - Buses, coaches, taxis, PHVs and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs)
- Class C - Buses, coaches, taxis, PHVs, HGVs and light goods vehicles (LGVs)
- Class D - Buses, coaches, taxis, PHVs, HGVs LGVs and cars

Each class prescribes associated vehicle emissions (as Euro Categories and Euro Standards); for compliant vehicles daily Clean Air Zone charges would not apply.

Clean Air Zone Consultation

A public consultation on options for the Clean Air Zone started on 4 July 2018 and ended on 17 August 2018. The Council participated in a joint Black Country response which has been led by external consultancy support; the key points are summarised below with the detailed response found in Appendix A.

- The Black Country Authorities support the need to significantly influence the travel choices of people accessing the city centre in order to improve air quality;
- Large concerns remain however around the specifics of Birmingham's proposal and the need to consider the impacts on people and businesses across the region as well as within close proximity to the zone;
- Further information is required around the distributional impacts of the proposals prior to the authorities being able to endorse the plans;

- There is a need to consider if/where national government (i.e. Defra/DfT) can play a role, either in terms of national initiatives or supporting negative impacts of displacement e.g. greater demand for Park and Ride facilities;
- Additional focus is required around the displacement effects at the border both in terms of bus and taxi cascading as well as the use of the park and ride facilities;
- Charging for private vehicles may not be sufficient enough to achieve a modal shift away from the car for people and businesses outside the Birmingham area and may have wider implications for visitors to the city and surrounding areas;
- There is a need to ensure that the CAZ fits well with supporting public transport infrastructure in that it's available when charging commences and is not undermined by the low pricing of private cars;

Secondary Impacts of the Birmingham City Council Clean Air Zone beyond Birmingham

The current measures as proposed may have wider dis-benefits associated with air quality improvements for the city centre. These have not as yet been sufficiently quantified and further information is presently sought on a range of issues as part of safeguarding the Black Country interest.

The Black Country authorities are particularly conscious that displacement of Birmingham vehicles (e.g. taxis, buses) could have a negative impact on air quality within neighbouring areas and this has been raised in the consultation response. Furthermore, the impact on demand for Park and Ride facilities, which cater for city centre demand but are funded by the surrounding Local Authorities, is a concern in certain areas of the Black Country (e.g. Sandwell) as some of these sites are already at (or near) capacity and further demand may lead to greater amounts of inappropriate parking on the surrounding routes.

Targeted Feasibility Report

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. Defra and the Department for Transport (DfT) Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU) provided the Council with a £50,000 grant to enable the authority to develop the Study.

In response, the Black County Authorities developed a joint submission which has been led by external consultancy support with detailed air pollutant modelling undertaken by Walsall Council. A copy of the Study can be found in Appendix B with the following text providing an overview.

Identified Road Links

The following road links were identified in Defra's national Pollution Control Model (PCM) as having projected exceedances of NO₂ of 40 micrograms per cubic metre (40µgm⁻³):

1. A454 Black Country Route (BCR) running west from M6 J10 towards A463 Black Country Route;
2. A463 BCR running west from A454 Black Country Route to Wolverhampton Local Authority Boundary;

3. A4148 Pleck Road from Ida Road/Rollingmill Street junction to Wolverhampton Road A454 into Wolverhampton Street/Blue Lane West and A4148 to junction with Green Lane A34/Court Way;
4. Court Way A4148/A34 Green Lane junction, west into and Littleton Street West to Broadway/Lichfield Street A461

Following a detailed review by Pollution Control Officers, the following road links were removed from the study as a result of compliance evidence put forward to the JQAU by the Council:

1. A463 BCR running west from A454 Black Country Route to Wolverhampton Local Authority Boundary
2. A4148 Pleck Road from Ida Road/Rollingmill Street junction to Wolverhampton Road A454
3. Court Way A4148/A34 Green Lane junction, west into and Littleton Street West to Broadway/Lichfield Street A461

Measures to bring forward Compliance

The Council challenged the inclusion of Wolverhampton Road A454 into Wolverhampton Street/Blue Lane West to the junction with Green Lane A34/Court Way and submitted further detailed assessment of these road links to Defra's JAQU. A response is awaited on this and it remains that consideration may be necessary of bringing forward interventions to reduce levels of NO₂ at the earliest opportunity.

In regard to the A454 BCR, aside from the long term M6 J10 Improvement Scheme, interventions such as adjusting the traffic signal timings on the gyratory and use of 'yellow box' road markings (hatching) were considered to optimise traffic flow where possible and reduce east-bound queuing traffic. Reducing the speed limit from 50mph to 40mph on the BCR was also evaluated, though ruled out due to its forecast ineffectiveness as well as challenges around enforcement.

Measures to improve walking and cycling in and around M6 J10 were also considered. Some of the Non-Motorised Units improvements would be incorporated as part of the Improvement Scheme. A further scheme has been outlined to increase connectivity across the junction gyratory and encourage greater levels of walking and cycling, though is yet to receive formal support from the Council and Highways England.

Signal optimisation and bus retrofitting with Selective Catalyst Reduction (SCR) technology was proposed at A4148 Wolverhampton Street. Optimising signalling at the junction was successfully delivered in 2015 which also improved connectivity for the existing cycle infrastructure.

Bus retrofit can be undertaken within 12 months for around 16 buses, though would require support and investment from bus operators though its effectiveness for the road link in question has not been determined

Next Steps

Following submission of the Technical Feasibility Study, Defra are to review and approve this prior to making Ministerial recommendations. Defra will then write to the Council once this is complete. If during the review Defra deem the study to be incomplete, further appraisal work may be required.

The submitted Study will be used to develop a Supplement to the national NO₂ Plan that the High Court has ruled Defra must publish by the 5 October 2018. The Supplement to the Plan will set out the process Defra have gone through and the conclusions reached for each of the identified road links, including the next steps to be taken by Government and by each local authority.

Defra are expecting to have concluded on recommendations for each road link (including identifying funding) in advance of publishing the Supplement to the national NO₂ Plan on 5 October, dependent on the scale/cost of the identified compliance measure.

Defra will continue in dialogue with the Council during the course of the next few months

West Midlands Low Emissions Towns and Cities Programme (WM LETCP)

WM LETCP is a partnership comprising the seven West Midlands local authorities working together to improve air quality and reduce emissions from road transport regionally. The intention has been to do this by promoting uptake of low emission fuels and technologies, establishing and sharing best practice policies, and developing various tools and resources for this purpose.

The objectives of the programme were set out to investigate and produce regional strategies designed to improve air quality with a view to meeting national air quality objectives. By direct association this promotes compliance with EU emission limits, reduction of carbon emissions and supported the objectives of the then Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) to improve air quality and reduce emissions from road transport.

It was initiated following three successful Defra Air Quality Grant scheme funding bids that were broadly apportioned as follows:

- a) £100,000 was awarded to Walsall Council in 2010/2011 to undertake the development of a Low Emissions Strategy and Best Practice Guidance on Public Sector Procurement and Planning.
- b) A further £120,000 was awarded in 2011/12 to undertake a Low Emissions Zone (LEZs) Technical Feasibility Study. This is examined various scenarios to develop a transferable “toolkit” for local authorities looking to designate LEZs, utilising four study zones which included:
 - i. Birmingham city centre within the inner and outer ring roads
 - ii. The M6 corridor between junctions for the M6 Toll Road
 - iii. A454 Wolverhampton Road /Black Country Route/Willenhall Road, Walsall to Wolverhampton
 - iv. A457 Sedgley Road/A459 Wolverhampton Road - Birmingham city centre to Wolverhampton
 - v. A4030 Bearwood Road

- vi. A456 Hagley Road/A458 Halesowen Road - Dudley to Birmingham
 - vii. A459 Cinder Bank/Halesowen Road, Netherton
 - viii. 4M bus route between Walsall and Brierley Hill
 - ix. A4600 Walsgrave Road, Coventry
- c) A third Defra grant application was made in June 2012 to extend the timescale and scope of the programme. Defra awarded a further £150,000 funding (also administered by Birmingham City Council) to include:
- i. The provision of further data concerning the West Midlands vehicle emission profile, traffic flows and forecasts, to be used as inputs to the LEZ Feasibility Study and with a particular focus on data analysis with respect to the M6 and M6 Toll Road scenarios.
 - ii. The development of a Low Emission Vehicle and Infrastructure Plan: this was intended build on LTP3 and findings of the LEZ Feasibility Study, to develop: 1) a bus emission strategy; 2) an emission agreement as part of the West Midlands Freight Strategy; 3) an initiative aimed at improving taxi emissions as part of licensing review; 4) and an Infrastructure Plan to facilitate uptake of low emission vehicles both in public and private sector.
 - iii. Work with Public Health Authorities, Health Protection Agencies, schools, and the NHS to develop an awareness campaign regarding the impacts of air pollution. This work was designed to build on findings of the LEZ Study Health Impact Assessment.

The following councils were tasked with leading on the development of work streams:

- a) Walsall - a Low Emissions (Vehicle) Strategy to reduce road transport emissions building on policies to avoid vehicle use and promote the shift to sustainable transport modes and also measures to accelerate the uptake of cleaner fuels and technologies;
- b) Coventry - Best Practice Guidance on the use of public sector procurement to reduce road transport emissions;
- c) Dudley - Best Practice Guidance on the use of the planning system to reduce road transport emissions; and
- d) Birmingham - feasibility of establishing Low Emissions Zones within the West Midlands urban centres based on a transferable model.

The LETCP was overseen by a Project Board between 2011 and 2016 comprising air quality specialists from each of the West Midland authorities. Walsall Council administered the Programme on behalf of the local authorities and chaired the Project Board. The administration of the LETCP now sits within the West Midlands Pollution Group.

Phases 1 and 2 were completed, with Phase 3 being led by Birmingham City Council. This latter phase has now been surpassed by developments in 2017 which has seen the requirement for Birmingham City Council to introduce a Clean Air Zone and Ministerial Directions to other West Midlands councils.

LETCP Good Practice Procurement Guidance

Building on fleet management work at Coventry City Council, the guidance develops themes in green fleet procurement highlighting the following policies and benefits:

- a) Local sourcing (reduced vehicle mileage)
- b) Sustainable fleet demonstration, specification and contract award criteria, including Government Buying Standards considerations
- c) Development of Whole Life Cost model, including damage costs of environmental impact
- d) Innovative procurement
- e) Development of public private partnerships

Good Practice Planning Guidance

Stemming from approaches to planning development used by Dudley Council, this aims to develop clear and consistent policy across the West Midlands that is designed to:

- a) Protect residents of future development schemes from exposure to air pollution
- b) Provide simplified assessment criteria and definition of sustainability
- c) Incorporate mitigation as a standard aspect to certain development schemes in line with the National Planning Policy Framework to help counter cumulative impacts

Since the publication of the Good Practice Planning Guidance, the Black Country authorities have produced the Black Country Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 2016 which draws heavily on the LETCP work.

Low Emissions Zone Feasibility Technical Study

The LETCP considers measures to investigate the potential for introducing Low Emission Zones (LEZs). A technical study into the feasibility of creating a transferable LEZ model for the West Midlands was commissioned in March 2013. This examined the potential impacts of available policy interventions in scenarios covering road networks detailed above.

The scope of the study incorporated assessment of the benefits and dis-benefits of emission control policies on principle vehicle types for each scenario, including cost benefit analysis and potential costing for implementing LEZ schemes as well as a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of the most effective intervention measures.

On behalf of the LETCP, AEA-Ricardo were appointed as the consultant-contractor by Birmingham City Council to undertake the technical LEZ feasibility study. Following an initial draft report which set out the scope of work, further refinements were incorporated

following consultation comments submitted on behalf of LETCP authorities. In December 2013 a report detailing scenario modelling was prepared by AEA-Ricardo. Proposed Low Emissions Vehicle Strategy (LEVS):

The proposed LEVS is an over-arching document for the West Midlands that was envisaged would be signed-off and endorsed at Combined Authority Level, with political endorsement. Changes in administrations has caused setbacks in taking this forward and it now requires updating to reflect current guidance and practices, as well as strategic developments in air quality at central government level.

LETCP Further Work

In light of the time that has elapsed since the first Good Practice Guidance and Proposed Low Emissions Vehicles were published, allied to developments in air quality since that time at a national level, the West Midlands Pollution Group has agreed that these documents will be updated using remaining funds. Work to this effect is therefore to be commissioned in September 2018.

The work outputs of WM LETCP are available at:

https://go.walsall.gov.uk/low_emissions_towns_and_cities_programme

Strategic Transportation

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.

Public Health Impact and Approaches

The link between clean air and better emotional and mental well-being is well-evidenced and reducing air pollution is imperative to achieving a healthier and fairer society. Air Quality is therefore a priority area for the Walsall Health and Wellbeing Board. The Board has set up a task and finish group to explore how Planning policies and processes can

support improvements to the health and wellbeing of the population. Improving air quality is one of key priorities for this group.

The Walsall Council's Transformation project "Shaping a Sustainable Healthy Environment" focuses on improving residents health through their environment. Membership of this Board includes officers from Public Health, Transport, Planning, Environmental Health, Resources, Clean Green, Housing and Procurement. A Transport and Health Sub Group focussing on "where we travel" includes officers from Transport, West Midlands Combined Authority, Transport, West Midlands, Licensing and Public Health and aims to pool expertise and develop programmes of work to ensure better use of Walsall's transport network, particularly in the promotion of healthy living.

There is a detailed action plan and indicators. Those that contribute to air quality are:

- A review of taxi licencing conditions which is currently underway and includes measures to improve air quality in Walsall, for example by reducing the maximum age of vehicles
- Actions to increase the number of electric vehicle charging points within the authority area.
- Actions to increase modal share of active and sustainable travel acknowledging the West Midlands Cycle Charter Target of an increase in cycle mode share to 5% of all trips by 2023 and 10% of all trips by 2033 with key actions.

A comprehensive approach to the ongoing promotion of cycling in Walsall includes:

- Planning a Walsall Green Spaces Event in 2019 to be held in conjunction with the launch of the Bikeshare Scheme
- Promoting existing Walsall Council Services to support cycling:
- Pool Bike Scheme – Bikes available for staff to travel to and from meetings.
- Cycle to Work Initiative - enables Walsall Council to lease bikes and associated safety equipment to their employees through what's called salary sacrifice.
- Cycle mileage – option to for cycle mileage to be claimed by staff.
- Commissioning of A*STARS schools active travel programme.

Joint work between Public Health and Pollution control is investigating the impact of poor air quality in the Borough. The impact of air pollutants (PM2.5) on acute care admissions for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) has been investigated. From April 2016-December 2017, monthly PM2.5 levels ranged from 6.99-18.36 g/m3, and positively correlated with COPD admissions. Peak pollutant levels, observed in January 2017, were associated with an excess of 53 admissions compared to the baseline, representing an 11.3% increase. The estimated cost to the local NHS economy of these excess admissions during this single month was £123,483, non-inclusive of the wider social and economic costs. Current work involves expanding the data collection system and including other emission indicators to allow for enhanced modelling.

Some of the highest levels of pollutants were observed in areas of high deprivation, which also accounted disproportionately for COPD admissions.

Resource and legal considerations:

Costings for NO₂ Technical Feasibility Study work was required as a result of Ministerial Direction and have been met via a one-off payment by Defra.

The Council continues to operate a network of continuous air quality monitoring stations which are maintained by Pollution Control. As well as requiring resources on an on-going basis, a third-party service contract is renewed on an annual basis. Operational costs are presently met by the service area and it is necessary to ensure continuity of this for future years.

On behalf of the Council, Pollution Control Service carries out statutory functions in terms of annual reporting to Government on air quality in the borough. This mandatory requirement needs to be sustained for the foreseeable future.

Through Public Health Transformation Fund support, a joint initiative between Public Health and Pollution Control delivers a monitoring and assessment programme on the public health impact of particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). £50,000 is commuted to the Pollution Control budget each year and it is envisaged this will need to continue until at least 2022 and potentially beyond.

Resource implications may change when Government produces an amended UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations and the new Clean Air Strategy later this year.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

Reduce atmospheric pollution to improve long-term health of the population.

The most vulnerable are protected from avoidable harm, including treating and caring for people in a safe environment.

Citizen impact:

Air quality has a direct influence on health of the general public as well as the environment. By virtue of EU directives, member states are correspondingly tasked with on-going duties to review and assess air quality annually.

It is recognised that poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. It is known to have more severe effects on vulnerable groups, for example the elderly, children and people already suffering from pre-existing health conditions (e.g. respiratory and cardiovascular conditions). Studies have suggested that the most deprived areas of Britain bear a disproportionate share of poor air quality.

The UK's statutory air quality review and assessment regime is designed to improve and safeguard the health of its citizens. By declaration of Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) local authorities have to demonstrate how they are working towards achieving national air quality objectives through the implementation of local air quality action plans and associated mitigation measures.

The Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) has identified that the evidence associating exposure to NO₂ with health effects has strengthened substantially in recent years. This is illustrated by an estimate of an effect on mortality equivalent to 23,500 premature deaths annually in the UK on the basis of NO₂ concentrations. Overall it is calculated poor air quality causes up to 40,000 premature deaths per year.

Environmental impact:

Appraisal of air quality is a mandatory function of local authorities, serving the purposes of identifying areas where air quality is failing and demonstrating to central government actions being taken to redress this within a framework of UK national and EU standards. This has particular relevance where there has been a need for declaration of AQMAs, as is the case for Walsall which has a borough-wide AQMA relating to NO₂.

The borough has a population of approximately 269,323 and an area of some 41 square miles through which major sources of transport-related air pollution are the M6 motorway dissecting the borough and major arterial roads including Wolverhampton Road (A454) from Walsall to Wolverhampton and Lichfield Road (A461). These are the primary concerns in respect to air quality affecting citizens.

Performance management:

There remains a potential threat of infraction proceedings levied by the European Parliament on central government on account of failures by the UK (as an EU member state) to achieve compliance with air quality limit values by prescribed dates. In-turn, there is a potential sanction on behalf of central government for this infraction to be passed on to local authorities, and so it is important for the Council to demonstrate that it is making efforts where required to ensure air quality meets defined standards.

All local authorities are required to demonstrate that they have discharged their air quality duties under Part 4 of the 1995 Environment Act with regard to published procedures and formal guidance. If necessary, they must also have designated AQMAs and drawn up related action plans. If the Secretary of State is satisfied this has been undertaken and air quality objectives are still not met, further action may have to be taken at a national level, possibly with the involvement of other agencies. Should the Secretary of State deem that the Council has not satisfied these conditions, a direction can be issued forcing the Council to undertake given work or tasks.

Through Scrutiny the need to effectively manage and resource air quality functions according to national requirements is identified in the context of potential service risks and future Council policy.

Reducing inequalities:

Development and delivery of local air quality action plans and measures designed to improve air quality must be an inclusive process, not only for the purposes of achieving national objectives, but also to link in with policies borough-wide.

These can have a direct effect on sustaining safer, cleaner, and stronger communities and providing support for vulnerable sectors.

Consultation:

Transportation Major Projects & Strategy

Council Fleet Services


Public Health Walsall

Background papers:

- Black Country Authorities final response to Birmingham Clean Air Zone consultation August 2018;
- Birmingham Clean Air Zone Consultation 'Brum Breathes; 'A Clean Air Zone for Birmingham';
- Black Country Authorities Targeted Feasibility Study submitted to Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Joint Air Quality Unit;
- Health Protection Forum Annual Report;
- Local Air Quality Management Policy Guidance (PG16) 2016;
- West Midlands Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee Report 21 November 2017 - The Role of the Combined Authority in Air Quality;
- West Midlands Low Emissions Towns and Cities Programme:
 - Proposed West Midlands Low Emissions Vehicle Strategy - October 2016
 - Good Practice Air Quality Planning Guidance - May 2014
 - Good Practice Procurement Guidance - September 2014
 - Low Emission Zones - Technical Feasibility Study WP1 Scenario modelling base case
 - LETCP Low Emissions Zones - Technical Feasibility Study WP1a Scenario modelling
 - Technical Feasibility Study WP2 Economic and Health Impacts
- UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations July 2017

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Appendix A

Joint Black Country response to Birmingham City Council's Clean Air Zone proposals

Appendix B

Black Country Targeted Feasibility Study