

Council – 6th January 2020

Notice of motion – Clean air outside schools

A Notice of Motion has been received from Councillors Shires and Barker. This motion states:

“This Council notes that:

- Our children, residents and staff, are exposed to what is considered to be unsafe levels of pollutants outside our schools at peak times during the “school run” in the morning and afternoon.
- Road transport is one of the biggest contributors to particulate matter and pollution across the Borough of Walsall.
- Epidemiological studies show that symptoms of bronchitis in asthmatic children increase in association to long term exposure to pollutants, as well as stunting growth.
- Only a handful of schools across England are trialling “No Vehicle Idling Zones” even though such trials have proven to bring many health benefits.
- Air pollution poses a serious threat to the health and development of young people. While many of the policy interventions to rectify this problem would have come from central Government and the West Midlands Combined Authority, this Council needs to do more to become more proactive on this issue.
- That there should be No Idling Zones around schools across the Borough.

This Council therefore resolves to request that Cabinet:

- Review the work done on No Vehicle Idling Zones by other local authorities across England in order to produce an Action Plan for Walsall on No Vehicle Idling Zones.
- Implement No Vehicle Idling Zones around all primary schools in the Borough by the end of 2022.
- Work closely with schools that are part of the scheme to engage with and inform parents and carers of the need for No Vehicle Idling Zones.
- Encourage all local businesses to sponsor “Green Walls” on school buildings and tree planting near to schools and that the appropriate Cabinet member include this in the Action Plan.
- Submits a report to the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2020, 2021 and 2022, setting out progress made on the above points.”

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Evidence shows that air pollution can have detrimental impacts on children's health (PHE, 2018). Different types of pollution can have different impacts, including reducing lung capacity, exacerbating asthma, and causing wheezing (PHE, 2018). The key pollutants that are most closely monitored are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (such as PM_{2.5}).
- 1.2 Improving poor air quality is a statutory objective for Walsall Council.
- 1.3 There is a National Air Quality Objective (mandatory limit) for NO₂, which has been set at an annual average concentration of 40µgm⁻³. Walsall has declared a borough-wide Air Quality Management Area for NO₂. Levels of NO₂ in Walsall have significantly improved in recent years, with only one road link in Walsall currently being identified that won't be in compliance with mandated limits by the end of 2021 (A454 Black Country Route (BCR) running west from M6 J10 towards A463 Black Country Route). This is forecast to improve in coming years due to the imminent junction improvements and cleaner vehicle technology becoming more widespread.
- 1.4 The national approach to PM_{2.5} emissions has been set out in the Clean Air Strategy, which aims to reduce the number of people living in locations above the World Health Organisation's Target of 10µgm⁻³. In the last few years, under a continuing joint project, Pollution Control and Public Health have worked to establish a local programme of PM_{2.5} monitoring, which was not previously available. This indicates that the areas with the highest PM_{2.5} levels are clustered around busy roads and road junctions, with preliminary modelling highlighting certain industrial processes within the borough. The Council are therefore working to future-proof monitoring with new technology to enable real-time data along with information on other size fractions of particulate matter which have been associate with adverse health impacts.

2.0 Current work on improving air quality

- 2.1 Public Health England's review of evidence for interventions that improve air quality highlighted that the most effective interventions are those that prevent emissions in the first place, for example those that shift people from cars into less polluting means of travel (PHE, 2019).
- 2.2 Walsall Council is currently undertaking a range of programmes of work to improve air quality across the borough by encouraging active, sustainable forms of travel. These programmes include the following:
 - Wide range of work to promote and support cycling in Walsall;

- Encouraging electric car use in Walsall by promoting the installation of charging points under the planning process;
- Work within planning to ensure sensitive developments are not located within areas with poor air quality;
- Partnership work through the West Midlands Low Emissions Towns and Cities Programme and Black Country Targeted Feasibility Study to look at reducing emissions from vehicles;
- Initial work to develop a Council-wide Travel Plan to encourage Council employees to adopt active, sustainable travel to work;
- Ongoing air quality monitoring and modelling work in conjunction with local and regional partners.

2.2 With regards to specific work centring on schools, Walsall Council's Public Health team also commission the A* Stars programme. As part of the programme, the A* Stars team work with schools to encourage sustainable active travel, such as walking and cycling to school. This helps to reduce car journeys to schools (improving air quality). They have also worked with schools to raise awareness of car idling.

3.0 Car Idling

3.1 A review of evidence into improving air quality by Public Health England identified anti-idling campaigns as potentially effective at improving localised air quality, although this conclusion was based on evidence that contained a lot of uncertainty (PHE, 2019).

3.2 There are existing statutory powers around car idling that are not currently exercised widely in Walsall:

Control of noise - stopping of engine whilst stationary

It can be an offence to leave a vehicle engine running unnecessarily while the vehicle is parked. This is dealt with by regulation 98 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986, as amended. These provisions are enforced by the police.

Improvement of air quality - exhaust emissions

The Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) (England) Regulations 2002 (SI 2002. No 1808) enable local authorities in England to issue fixed penalty notices to drivers who allow their vehicles to run unnecessarily while stationary on the road. Whilst at present Walsall Council has not adopted these provisions due to implications concerning staff resources, they allow for an authorised officer to issue a fixed penalty notice of £20.00 if a driver refuses to turn off the engine when requested to do so. Education of motorists must form a core element of any enforcement activity, with fixed

penalty notices only being issued to motorists who refuse to comply. Legislation allows exemptions to enforcement that have to be considered and include legitimate needs to idle a vehicle for defrosting purposes and temperature control in hot weather.

4.0 **School Zones**

The introduction of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) that restricts vehicular access to the school gate during specified times could bring positive benefits to air quality and road safety. Such a scheme would continue to allow access for resident vehicles but prevent the normal school run traffic from driving or parking within the restricted zone.

Background papers

Reports to Health and Wellbeing Board: 10 April 2018, 23 July 2018 and 3 December 2018.

Reports to Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 11 September 2018

References

PHE (2018). Health matters: air pollution. Accessed 9/12/19 via:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-air-pollution/health-matters-air-pollution>

PHE (2019). Review of interventions to improve outdoor air quality and public health. Accessed 10/12/19 via:
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