

BRIEFING NOTE

To: Sustainability & Transport Overview & Scrutiny Committee

From: Mark Wolstencroft, Operations Manager Environmental Protection

Date: 30 September 2020

Subject: Air Quality Action Plan Consultation Launch

1. Background

- 1.1 Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 introduced a national framework for air quality management whereby all local authorities are required to annually review the air quality within their boundaries. Following the review local authorities must assess the air quality against the objectives specified for the pollutant of concern. Where the process has indicated that the objective will not be achieved within the statutory timeframe then the local authority is required to designate an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) at the earliest possible date. The local authority is then required to produce an action plan to demonstrate how the authority intends to work towards meeting the air quality objectives within its Air Quality Management Area.
- 1.2 Following an extensive review Birmingham City Council declared the whole of the city as an AQMA in January 2003 for nitrogen dioxide. This declaration was made in accordance with the requirements of Part IV of the Environment Act 1995.
- 1.3 An Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was issued in 2005 and reviewed and updated in 2011. This remains the current version of the AQAP.

2. Revising the AQAP

- 2.1 The intention was to update the plan in 2016 but early discussions with Central Government suggested the need for an area-based intervention to address air quality issues and the decision was taken to delay the introduction of an updated plan pending the work into what became the Clean Air Zone (CAZ).
- 2.2 Now that the feasibility study for the CAZ has been completed, incorporating an update to the road network model and the introduction of new emission factors following the vehicle emissions scandal (colloquially, the "VW scandal") it became necessary to review pollutant concentrations outside of the city centre area and this version of the AQAP seeks to do that in a phased, intelligence led approach.

- 2.3 The current version of the AQAP focuses on the city centre area as a polluted area as that is consistent with monitoring and modelling data available at the time the plan was issued (2011). This is also consistent with Defra modelling leading into the discussions around a CAZ.
- 2.4 There is however a recognised need to review air quality outside the city centre in more detail due to changes in the vehicle fleet (numbers and composition) and due to changes in emission factors following the vehicle emissions scandal.
- 2.5 An intelligence led approach has been devised to deliver this review based on changes to our existing model, updated vehicle flows and changes to exposure brought about by new residential development and changes in occupancy.
- 2.6 Environmental Health are suggesting three tranches of additional monitoring outside of the city centre to focus on those areas identified to ascertain if they do indeed present an air quality problem and the likely reason for that problem, anticipated to be traffic related. Where any monitoring indicates higher levels of pollution then a strategy to undertake more extended monitoring will be devised as will early discussions with colleagues in relevant services e.g. Transportation to see what action can be taken in that area.
- 2.7 The consultation version of the AQAP was prepared by Air Quality Consultants (AQC) under contract from the Council. AQC liaised with officers from a range of services to ensure that the approach within the plan and the relevant actions to be taken were suitable given existing actions underway e.g. the CAZ, and the state of understanding around air quality concentrations in the city.
- 2.8 The actions proposed within the revised AQAP are thematic and each encompasses a range of interventions being taken by the various Council services. These are suitable given the intelligence to date and each will support the control and reduction of air pollution emissions whilst allowing the Council the flexibility to act appropriately within that wide topic area.
- 2.9 Specifically, Action 1 reinforces the delivery of the CAZ, whilst Action 5 provides the overarching approach to dealing with any hotspots identified through the extended monitoring exercises (the three tranche approach).

3. Consultation

- 3.1 All AQAP's are required to be consulted upon within the local authority area and with key organisations. This report introduces the proposed consultation version of the AQAP. This has been through Cabinet and has executive approval to progress to consultation.
- 3.2 The consultation opened on 21 September 2020 and is set to close on 2 November 2020. Documents and the consultation response form may be accessed from <https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/place/air-quality-action-plan/>

- 3.3 The consultation seeks views on the overall approach set out within the AQAP, whether any improvements should be made and seeks open views air quality / pollution related matters. The consultation also explores views around idling engines and links into the work of Brum Breathes, the Emergency Travel Plan and the consultation on improved cycling and walking facilities.
- 3.4 The consultation also allows responses from both individuals and businesses to allow a further refinement of the responses.
- 3.5 Upon completion of the consultation the responses will be assessed and the information used to refine the AQAP (where appropriate) into a final version which will be progressed to publication.

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