

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy
and Performance Board

DATE: 24 June 2014

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health

PORTFOLIO: Environmental Services

SUBJECT: Report on Air Quality in Halton 2015

WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The report presents an overview of air quality in Halton. It presents a summary of national and local air quality monitoring, progress against national and European Air Quality legislation and provides a response to a petition for Air Monitors received by Halton Borough Council in March 2015.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the report be noted; and**
- (2) the recommendations contained within the report be submitted to Executive Board and it be recommended by this Board that those recommendations be supported.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 Halton Borough Council monitors air quality within the borough and complies with all Air Quality Objectives with the exception of Nitrogen Dioxide (for which the Council have declared 2 Air Quality Management Areas in two Widnes town centre locations where Nitrogen Dioxide, NO₂, objectives exceed air quality directive standards as a result of road traffic)

3.1.2 Air quality in Halton has improved significantly in recent decades. The proportion of deaths attributable to air pollution is similar to the national average, and considerably lower than many other areas of the country.

3.1.3 The Council is committed to improving air quality in Halton and will continue to do so through the development of a strategy and action plan.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 Halton Borough Council received a petition entitled “Request for the Council to Monitor the Air Quality for PM2.5 and other toxins” on 6th March 2015 with 5632 signatories.

3.2.2 The petition stated:

“Halton is a highly polluted area and our local authority have allowed a massive waste incinerator to be built. We have had a number of leaks already at the plant.

We want to protect the health of our children from these highly toxic contaminants, this can only be done by Monitoring the Air Quality for PM 2.5 and other toxins.

Our council to date has refused even though we are in an area that the British Government is being sued by the European Courts for failing comply with the European Directive on Air Quality”.

3.2.3 This report provides a response to this petition and identifies the facts around air quality and air quality monitoring in Halton within the national and international frameworks and identifies recommendations going forward.

3.2.4 The report looks at:

- Air Quality legislation
- National and local trends in air quality
- Monitoring results within Halton
- Health in Halton

3.3 Summary and conclusions of the report

3.3.1 Air quality in Halton is assessed and monitored regularly in order to comply with UK and EU Air Quality legislation and protect health. Air Quality objectives have been achieved in Halton for all currently legislated pollutants with the exception of Nitrogen Dioxide.

3.3.2 Halton has declared two Air Quality Management Areas, both of them in Widnes, where levels of NO₂ exceed the objective levels on more occasions than is permissible as part of the objective standards. The levels of NO₂ are higher in these two areas as a result of traffic activity through Town Centre roads. As a result of the declaration of Air Quality Management Areas, these areas are subject to additional measures and Halton Borough Council is working hard to ensure that the levels of NO₂ in these areas fall to within permitted levels as soon as possible. These activities include traffic flow alterations, alternative signage and promotion of active, none vehicular transport etc.

3.3.3 National and European Air Quality Objectives are determined at levels to protect health. As Halton meets all these criteria (except in designated AQMAs), the air quality cannot be considered to be at levels poor enough to affect health.

3.3.4 Halton experiences poorer levels of health than many other areas in the country. This however can be explained in the most part by lifestyle factors and the higher rates of less healthy lifestyles activities undertaken within Halton. The Council and local partners are continuing to address the factors which impact greatly on health including encouraging people to stop smoking, improving access to, and awareness of, healthy diets, access to weight management programmes, appropriate alcohol use, improvements in local amenities and encouraging more active lifestyles. The Council have a set of key Health and Wellbeing Priorities to improve the health of the population, and is actively engaged in improving life chances and making it easier for everyone to make healthier lifestyle choices by ensuring it works across all agencies to improve education, enhance employment opportunities, and provide healthy safe and thriving homes and communities.

3.3.5 Over 4600 people who live in Halton have signed a petition believing that the Council does not monitor air quality and that air quality in Halton is poor enough to affect health despite evidence being available that both of these assertions are incorrect.

3.4 Key recommendations made in the report

3.4.1 In order to address the issues raised in this report and ensure that air quality in Halton remains good and ultimately to improve health and wellbeing in Halton, the Council has identified a number of recommendations for future action:

- i Undertake a series of public engagement events to build a greater understanding of the concerns local people have regarding air quality in Halton and identify opportunities to build improved transparent relationships to ensure a clear way forward in all concerns.
- ii Develop an active multi agency Air Quality Forum (including lay representation) to enable issues and concerns can be raised and discussed in an open, engaged forum and facilitate agreement on actions and outcomes.
- iii Investigate further opportunities to limit emissions and reduce NO₂ in areas of potential high traffic activity around built up areas and achieve compliance with NO₂ Air Quality Objectives.

- iv Develop a full Air Quality Strategy, based on available local and national data and evidence to ensure that Halton is able to sustain recent improvements in Air Quality across the borough and proactively seek to remove the declaration of Air Quality Management Areas within the borough.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council is required to assess Air Quality under UK Air Quality Directives.
- 4.2 The Council will develop an Air Quality Strategy if recommendations in this report are agreed.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There may be financial implications in undertaking the recommendations of these reports but these are not expected to be significant.
- 5.2 The issue of air quality and monitoring is one of public interest.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Ensuring the health and wellbeing of the population is a key priority. Protecting the health of Halton's population is a statutory responsibility for Public Health and the Council.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Protecting the health of Halton's population is a statutory responsibility for Public Health and the Council. Ensuring good air quality is a key factor in assuring and protecting health.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 There is a risk that factually inaccurate information can cause unnecessary concern for residents, investors and visitors to the Borough. The purpose of the report is to present the facts around air quality in Halton to ensure a balanced view is achieved.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 There are no equality and diversity issues associated with this report.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the act.