

REPORT TO:	Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board
DATE:	28 June 2017
REPORTING OFFICER:	Director of Public Health
PORTFOLIO:	Health & Wellbeing
SUBJECT:	Update on Air Quality Forum and Air Quality Activity
WARDS:	Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report presents an update of the progress of the Air Quality Forum since its first meeting in July 2016. Also provides a general update on Air quality and related activities over the last year.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the contents of the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Air Quality Forum formation

3.1.1 The formation of the Halton Air Quality Forum came about following the recommendations made within the Halton Report on Air Quality, and subsequently adopted by the Council Executive Board in 2015. One of the key recommendations was:

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.

3.1.2 The forum took some time in development to ensure it had engagement from a wide range of stakeholders including council members, regulatory bodies, local industry, transport and members of the general community. The first meeting was held on 27th July 2016.

3.2 Air Quality Forum membership and constitutions

3.2.1 An appropriate independent Chair was identified and subsequently accepted, to act as Chair for the forum. Dr Alex Stewart, a now retired Consultant in Health Protection at Public Health England, has a wide interest as well as expert knowledge of air quality in a broad sense, in particular the effect upon health. Whilst retired he maintains an interest in the area and maintains a number of teaching and research links with

several academic institutions including Liverpool John Moores, Chester and Exeter.

3.2.2 Active membership of the Forum currently consists of representatives from:

Three Local Elected Members
Halton Borough Council Officers (public health, environmental health, transport, communication teams)
Community representation from Widnes and Runcorn
Environment Agency
INOVYN
Manchester Port Health Authority
NHS Halton CCG
Public Health England
Scottish and Southern Electric
VIRIDOR

United Utilities are engaged in discussions but will attend where they feel a topic area requires their input. A number of other industry representatives were approached, including from key haulage and transport organisation involved within the Borough, but engagement has not yet been secured.

3.2.3 A terms of reference of the group have been agreed which include the following objectives:

- Establish and agree the current facts regarding air quality within Halton
- Identify and develop mechanisms to address, on an ongoing basis, key issues and concerns from all sectors of the community
- Seek to find ways to reduce air pollution where monitoring highlights an area exceeding or predicted to exceed national standards
- Identify and develop a focussed action plan to address identified needs and discuss those in an open, engaged forum to facilitate agreement on actions and outcomes
- Build strong communication and transparent relationships between the public sector, industry, statutory agencies and Halton residents.

3.2.4 The Terms of reference state that a process to identify and elect a next chair will take place within 2 years, and there is consensus that this role should remain independent.

3.3 Implementation of other recommendations

3.3.1 The other recommendations made in the air quality report included:

- 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.

- 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.
- 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.

3.3.2 A methodology for engagement and consultation has been explored and resources are being identified which will enable the engagement work to proceed.

3.3.3 The forum is continually working to identify opportunities for improvements across all sectors. The council is also continuing to develop initiatives across departments and with stakeholders that will contribute to improved air quality across the area; these include continued improvements to engine technology and low emissions approaches in local fleets; working with local businesses to promote cleaner transport and new technologies; continued work with transport and highways to establish and remedy traffic congestion, particularly in the identified Air Quality Management Areas; engaging with regulators to provide assurance of effective processes and regulation across the Borough, continued promotion of active transport including improved cycle track provision, promotion of cycling and walking options.

3.3.4 A Joint strategic Needs assessment for Air quality is scheduled in the work plan for the health intelligence team for the forthcoming year and will be completed as soon as possible. The data within the JSNA will help inform the development of the strategy, alongside the direction of travel identified within the National strategy which is due for publication within the next few months. The available data and national strategy, alongside local consultation and stakeholder involvement will be used to define the local strategy and direction of travel.

3.4 Next steps and considerations

3.4.1 Progress with the development of the open forum has been slow, as before any air quality work can commence the group has had to form and work towards agreeing reference and activities. Commitment from the currently engaged partners is good and we are constantly working to widen the stakeholder involvement and collaborations.

3.4.2 Consideration needs to be given to the development of an internal air quality officers group to ensure that all relevant departments are equally engaged and undertake joined up approaches for air quality improvement as a whole, and to best ensure collaboration between

competing air quality foci, for example public health, environmental health, regeneration, business and enterprise, transport, green space etc with senior or elected member leadership.

3.4.3 Consideration needs to be given to the resource available, time and financial, to support activities on air quality presently and in the future.

3.5 General Air Quality update

National Air Quality Plan

3.5.1 A draft national plan: 'Improving air quality in the UK: tackling nitrogen dioxide in our towns and cities' has been released in consultation format. Consultation closed on Friday 16th June.

3.5.2 The plan is very much a focus on Nitrogen dioxide as a vehicle emission and highlights potential mechanisms to reduce the emission of nitrogen dioxide focussing opportunities to use technology, traffic management and Clear Air Zones as a mode of reducing NO₂ in the highest polluting areas.

3.5.3 Halton has been named in the draft plan as one of 40 local authority areas with roads with concentrations of nitrogen dioxide modelled to be persistently above statutory levels. Halton is modelled in the report as having a predicted NO₂ level of 58 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2017 against a European Directive level of 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. This data has been queried with DEFRA in terms of its accuracy as it is not reflective of the real time monitoring data that we obtain from our Automatic Urban and Rural Network (AURN) monitor. It has been acknowledged that within the report that the modelled data may be an overestimate due to modelling being taken during unusual traffic activity, with the development of the Mersey Gateway as a potential contributing factor.

3.5.4 Halton Borough Council have submitted a response to the consultation which acknowledges a national approach to air quality, but raises concerns that focussing on nitrogen dioxide as a single pollutant affecting air quality is not helpful in setting a focus for local areas to address the scale and breadth of pollutants that can lead to poor air quality. The response also highlights that there is little commitment to put in place national legislation or support mechanisms and too much emphasis is placed on small areas to address an issue which crosses multiple geographical boundaries.

Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA)

3.5.4 Real time monitoring data (from an analyser located on Milton Road, part of the Widnes AQMA) indicates that levels of NO₂ and Particulate Matter (PM₁₀) are consistently below objective levels.

- 3.5.5 Halton Borough Councils have continued to implement improvements to the road and transport networks and infrastructure, reflective of the Transport Strategy action plan. Halton Borough Council have recently purchased 2 additional electric vehicles for the Council fleet – including one used as a courier van and both used to support meals on wheels.
- 3.5.6 Eight electric charging points have been installed across the Borough including at points in Halton lea and Church Road in Runcorn with a additional 4 planned in the very near future.
- 3.5.7 We continue to make improvements and extensions to cycle and walking lanes with current extensions including the links across the M56 towards Warrington, and major improvements to routes between Clifton Roundabout towards St Chads school,
- 3.5.8 There continue to be a programme of improvements to relieve traffic congestion around the Widnes town centre, including improvements to the Widnes gyratory near to the Hive to reduce idling traffic.

Air Quality Monitoring

- 3.5.9 An application was received to the Environment Fund Board requesting additional monitoring across Weston Point. The application was approved for funding of 12months of data in Weston Point.
Environmental health have requested that in order to satisfy prior concerns about the quality of existing data, the monitoring and should be undertaken, and report submitted by an independent Air Quality Consultant. Environmental health have contributed to the development of a specification which can be used to procure an independent consultancy and the progress is currently awaiting procurement approval.

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 a local Air Quality Strategy in response to local issues and in direction of the forthcoming National Air Quality Plan.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There may be financial implications in undertaking the series of initiative required to see any improvements in local Air quality and in response to actions required under the national strategy.
- 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 key priority.
Protecting the health of Halton's population is a statutory responsible 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 responsible for
Public Health and the Council. Ensuring good air quality is a key factor in
assuring and protecting health.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

Failing to respond appropriately to directions with the forthcoming
National Air Quality Plan could have result in penalties or prosecution

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None considered.