

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Air Quality Strategy Update

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

1. To note the contents of the report
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Date of O&S meeting: 25 September 2018

Chair of O&S Committee: Cllr Chilton

Relevant Portfolio(s): Community Safety and Wellbeing
Environment and Land Management
Planning and Development
HR & Customer Services
Culture

Summary: This report provides an update for members on the preparation of an air quality strategy for the council as a summation of ongoing, proposed and potential actions to enact the recommendations previously made by the Committee.

Exempt from Publication: NO

Background Papers: **Report from Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Findings of the Air Quality Task Group** report to Cabinet of 8 February 2018.

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Report Title: Air Quality Strategy Update

Introduction

1. Following previous discussion of the findings of the Air Quality Task Group and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee by Management Team, officers from impacted services have met with the Policy and Performance team to discuss the recommendations arising from the Air Quality Task Group.
2. This report provides an update for members on the preparation of an air quality strategy for the council as a summation of ongoing, proposed and potential actions to enact the recommendations previously made by the Committee.

Update Position

Recommendation 1:

The recommendations and evidence base contained within this report form an Air Quality Strategy for the Council.

3. The strategy is being prepared by the Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer and Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager with assistance from affected services.

Recommendation 2:

If a CIL regime is adopted by the Council for new developments, contributions should be set aside for air pollution mitigation measures.

4. Planning and Development officers advise that CIL is being brought forward by government, however the exact form it will take following the release of the latest version of the National Planning Policy Framework is presently unknown and the regulation 123 list may not exist in future as the basis for contributions.
5. On the assumption that the regulation 123 list continues to be the means for specifying developer contributions, air quality could be included within the council's list, however given the absence of declared air quality management areas or projected exceedances of air pollutant limits contributions for air pollution mitigation would be considered a low priority and as such the council may struggle to secure CIL contributions.
6. Additionally, the inclusion of air quality mitigation contributions on the authority's regulation 123 list would preclude the authority from collecting contributions through section 106 agreements. Officers advise that given the specificity assigned to contributions gathered through a section 106 agreement, this may be the most appropriate mechanism to address any mitigation required as a result of individual developments coming forward which were projected to have a negative impact on air quality.

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Recommendation 3:

The Council adopt the points noted in table 2 on page 9 of the report as best practice guidance for reducing air pollution in new developments.

7. Officers note that any issued 'best practice guidance' could not overlap planning conditions and was not of itself enforceable; however some of the points contained within this recommendation could realistically be applied to development as planning conditions with which developers would be required to comply.
8. Planning and Development officers advise that the provision of electric vehicle charging points within new residential and non-residential development is already being required by condition, with electric vehicle charging capability specified for 50% of parking spaces at the new Elwick Place hotel. Volume housebuilders have also demonstrated a willingness to deliver electric vehicle charging capability as detailed in point 1 in response to growing and anticipated demand for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles.
9. Officers note that points 1, 4 and 5 of the below table identified by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could form planning conditions for appropriate developments based on the ratios identified within the below table, whilst point 3 could form part of the stipulations of construction management plans for development. It is felt that point 2 would be an onerous restriction to place on developers that may have a limited impact on nitrogen dioxide concentrations within the borough.

- Each proposed dwelling with a designated parking space provided by means of a driveway, carport, or garage should be provided with at least one Electric Vehicle charging point. Such charging point may be a dedicated Electric Vehicle charging socket, or suitably rated three-pin socket capable of safely providing a slow charge to an Electric Vehicle via a domestic charging cable.
Reason: To take into account the cumulative impacts of development on air quality and to encourage the use of sustainable transport modes including incorporation of facilities for charging plug-in vehicles.
- Each dwelling to be provided with gas-fired boilers should meet a minimum standard of <40mgNO_x/kWh.
Reason: To take into account the cumulative impacts on air quality from individual sites in local area
- Major developments should be carried out in accordance with the Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) Guidance on the Assessment of Dust from Demolition and Construction.
Reason: To take into account the cumulative impacts on air quality from individual sites in local areas, and to ensure permitted operations to not have unacceptable adverse impacts on human health.
- Major residential development with unallocated off street car parking should be provided with a minimum of one dedicated Electric Vehicle Charging point per ten spaces for the use of the car park user, and be maintained thereon.

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Reason: To take into account the cumulative impacts of development on air quality and to encourage the use of sustainable transport modes including incorporation of facilities for charging plug-in vehicles.

- Major Commercial/Retail/Industrial development with parking provision for ten or more car parking spaces should be provided with a minimum of one Electric Vehicle Charging point (increasing to an additional point for every additional thirty car parking spaces) for the use of the car park user, and be maintained thereon.

Reason: To take into account the cumulative impacts of development on air quality and to encourage the use of sustainable transport modes including incorporation of facilities for charging plug-in vehicles.

Recommendation 4:

The Council should adopt, and require developers to abide by, planting strategies which will support pollutant mitigation and effective street ventilation.

10. Whilst some plant species mitigate airborne pollutants to a greater degree than others, all plant species contribute to the mitigation of air pollution. Air quality supportive planting has been examined by the Environment and Land Management Service (which Aspire Landscape Management is a part of) and officers have noted case studies in Australia where specific planting strategies had been adopted with climate impact considerations, however there was no evidential basis that such planting strategies have a tangible increase in air pollutant mitigation above the maintenance of existing roadside planting.
11. There is no evidence of 'canyoning' (whereby the dispersal of pollutant concentrations is limited by tall, closely massed buildings and extensive tree canopies) along key transport corridors within Ashford to address, and as such any adjustment to roadside planting would be unlikely to provide a net benefit to street ventilation. Through bringing grounds maintenance services back in house with the creation of Aspire Landscape Management, the council has already ensured greater control of the quality of planting in green spaces in the town, and it is felt that greater impacts in pollutant dispersal may be achieved through retaining a focus on improving traffic flow along key routes.
12. In regard to new development, the council already sets good standards for green space provision through its existing Public Green Spaces and Water SPD (adopted July 2012) and within the borough and has a strong history of securing developer contributions to deliver additional high quality green space. Additionally, the council works with Kent County Council (as the highway authority for Ashford) on roadside planting for new developments.
13. Several plant species which provide improved pollutant mitigation (such as the London Plane, *Platanus × acerifolia*) are not permitted for roadside planting by Kent County Council due to the impact of root growth on pavements and roads and consequential increases in maintenance costs. Planning and Development will however continue to work collaboratively with the county council to secure high standards of roadside planting.

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Recommendation 5:

The Council should expand the network of electric vehicle charging points within the borough, utilising S106 and government grant funding as appropriate.

14. Steps are already being taken to expand the network of electric vehicle charging points, with additional charge points due to be installed as part of the developments at Elwick Place and Victoria Way. It should be noted however that the council is not currently approaching capacity for its existing charging points.
15. The majority of government grant funding related to air quality is restricted to local authorities with declared air quality management areas or projected exceedances of pollutant concentration limits, however it is felt that the council could identify potential sites for expansion of the existing charging point network and consider carefully any available funding which it is eligible for. This is discussed further in relation to recommendations 25 and 26 (paragraphs 40-42)
16. Section 106 agreements must be written with reference to specific projects, and for this reason it is felt that contributions for the expansion of electric vehicle charging points should be sought through Community Infrastructure Levy payments to allow for a more flexible application of funding in response to increased demand.
17. As noted in the response to recommendation 3, the council can utilise planning conditions to stipulate the provision of electric vehicle charging points within residential and non-residential development, which could serve to expand the network of charging points within the borough beyond areas directly controlled by the council.

Recommendation 6:

The Council work with Kent County Council to explore options for providing on-street vehicle charging infrastructure to meet resident demand, including promoting relevant OLEV grant schemes and other trials.

18. Promotion of OLEV grant schemes for the subsidised installation of electric vehicle charging points to respond to individual householder can form part of an improved online presentation of air quality information as discussed in the response to recommendation 27.
19. Officers are aware of ongoing trials of options to provide on-street charging facilities through the provision of specific charging points (in Thanet) and through retrofitting charging sockets to lampposts. These trials will be monitored on an ongoing basis for suitability, however to date the council is not aware of any requests from residents for on-street charging facilities within the borough.

Recommendation 7:

The Council engage with Kent County Council over the potential of Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) to optimise traffic flow within Ashford.

20. The potential for improving traffic flow through optimising signal phasing within Ashford warrants investigation to establish if adjustments can be made by Kent

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County Council which would have a positive impact on air pollutant dispersal. It is felt that this may be best pursued by the Joint Transportation Board through dialogue with Kent County Council officers.

Recommendation 8:

The Council request that Kent County Council seek to avoid negative impacts on air quality when designing speed reduction measures within the borough.

21. It is recognised that the primary aim of speed reduction measures will be to increase the safety of road users and the design of such measures will be solely within the purview of Kent County Council, however the council can play a role through the Joint Transportation Board in highlighting the importance that the council attaches to air quality to Kent Highways and requesting that as far as possible air quality impacts are considered at the design stage.

Recommendation 9:

That the Council consider reducing or removing parking charges for electric vehicles within its car parks to encourage use of these vehicles.

22. In considering this recommendation due regard must be had to the potential impact on the council's medium term financial plan which would arise from a reduction in parking charge income. As the market share of electric and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) is increasing, with central government having signalled its aim for all new vehicles to be zero emission by 2040, the long term sustainability of removing parking charges for certain vehicles comes into question, particularly as the council's maintenance costs for car parks will not reduce.

Recommendation 10:

New HGV parking facilities within the Borough should consider provide infrastructure to cater for electric HGV charging and refrigeration.

- 23.30 Electric charging points have been installed within the Waterbrook truck stop to enable refrigerated HGVs to run chillers without utilising diesel. Conditions of use for the Waterbrook truck stop also prohibit fridge units running on site unless charging points are used. Planning conditions can be used to require the provision of charging points on any new HGV parking facilities that may come forward.

Recommendation 11:

Through its membership of the Ashford Quality Bus Partnership, the Council should endeavour for bus services within the Borough to operate using vehicles at Euro IV emission standard or higher.

24. The Quality Bus Partnership agreement between Ashford Borough Council, Kent County Council and Stagecoach South East was revised and resigned in 2016. Whilst not legally binding, the agreement does include a pledge to pursue improvements in the emissions standard of buses operating in the Borough; with a report on the percentage of buses in operation of euro standard 3, 4, 5 and 6

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being presented to each meeting of the partnership which will allow for monitoring of emissions standards in line with the aims of the air quality strategy.

Recommendation 12:

Developer monies gathered under policy TRA4 of the (draft) Local Plan to 2030 should be used to fund enhancements to the local bus network which will encourage a modal shift from use of the private car to public transport.

25. Whilst policy TRA4 notes that the council, in liaison with the County Council, will seek enhancements to the local bus network in order to meet the additional demands created by new development as it comes forward, it should be noted that cuts to the public transport budget made by the county council present potential difficulties in respect of an appropriate mechanism to pay over contributions gathered by the council to KCC. It is suggested that the Quality Bus Partnership utilise its existing partnership with KCC and Stagecoach to ensure that contributions can be appropriately applied to the benefit of the local bus network.

Recommendation 13:

That the Council, through appropriate channels, encourage the uptake of electric and hybrid vehicles within the taxi and private hire fleets within the Borough.

26. The council's licensing team has highlighted government grant schemes to the Taxi Forum (representing the taxi and private hire trade), however the trade representatives expressed little interest in pursuing such grant funding opportunities. As a means to incentivise the trade, the council's licensing team has proposed waiving the annual licensing fee for the first three years that a 'green' vehicle is on an operator's fleet. This scheme would be funded through monies gathered under policy CS10 of the Core Strategy at a level that would cover the replacement of up to 10 vehicles per year, with a review of the scheme taking place prior to 2022.

Recommendation 14:

The Council consider subsidising a programme of fuel-efficient driver training for taxi and private hire drivers.

27. The council's licensing team will survey the trade to establish whether there would be sufficient demand to justify operating such a programme.

Recommendation 15:

That new commercial developments include adequate provision for facilities to enable and support cycling to work by staff.

28. This recommendation can be enacted through planning conditions on appropriate developments, as discussed in regard to recommendation 3. It should be noted that the recently completed Connect 38 (phase 1 of the Ashford Commercial Quarter) includes changing facilities, showers and covered cycle storage within the building to encourage cycling to work.

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Recommendation 16:

An audit of cycling facilities should be undertaken as part of the preparation of the new Borough Cycling Strategy, with additional storage facilities installed where demand for cycle storage exceeds or is likely to exceed supply.

29. As part of the development of the council's Walking and Cycling Strategy, an audit of cycling infrastructure will be carried out with the Department for Transport.

Recommendation 17:

The Council continues its support for walk-to-school schemes in the Borough.

30. The council provides £1000 of funding per annum to the walk to school scheme and will continue to do so. As well as reducing vehicle trips to schools (and so reducing emissions), the walk to school scheme supports the healthy weight focus of the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board.

Recommendation 18:

Kent Police be asked to dissuade vehicle idling outside schools as part of Operation OPEYE.

31. It was felt that the issues associated with emissions from idling vehicles outside schools could be highlighted through the council's work with schools during Safety in Action week. Officers also noted that a visible uniformed presence may be strong deterrent to vehicle idling once drivers have been made aware of the health impacts of engine idling, and that consideration should be given to whether this could be achieved through the deployment of the council's enforcement officers.

Recommendation 19:

The Council should review its lease car and mileage claim schemes to exclude high polluting vehicles from eligibility and promote ultra-low and zero emission vehicles.

32. Mileage allowances are benchmarked against HMRC rates and cannot be changed, however HR and Customer Services will explore what limits can be introduced within the council's lease car scheme to reduce access to high polluting vehicles. The council can more readily limit the emissions of its own managed fleet (commercial vehicles) through the procurement process, and has already introduced this in several areas (e.g. Aspire's vehicle fleet consists of vehicles at a Euro 6 emissions standard).

Recommendation 20:

The Council remove parking permit charges for staff with ultra-low and zero emission vehicles.

33. The council has removed parking charges for all staff vehicles.

Recommendation 21:

The Council explore the feasibility of staff cycling to site or home visits within Ashford as an alternative to car use.

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34. The council already offers a mileage rate for work travel (not commuting) by bicycle and this has been promoted in the most recent issue of Root and Branch, the staff magazine. The council will monitor the scheme to establish if any need to set limits on time or range arises.

Recommendation 22:

The Council operate a programme of fuel-efficient driver training for all designated essential car users who are required to drive Council fleet vehicles for their respective roles.

35. Some services with fleet vehicles (Aspire, Environment and Land Management) monitor the fuel consumption of their fleet vehicles against vehicle mileage to identify inefficiencies in driving style, and it is proposed that this should be carried out as an exercise across the council's managed fleet to establish if issues with fuel efficiency exist which may give rise to increased emissions.
36. As a further step, services where 'grey fleet' (staff utilising their own or lease scheme vehicles for work travel) is utilised will be canvassed to gauge interest in the potential uptake of such training; and HR and Customer Services will explore any options for delivering such training through the new lease scheme operators.

Recommendation 23:

The Council should compile a comprehensive workplace travel plan which identifies means to improve the percentage of staff utilising sustainable means to travel to work.

37. The council will undertake a survey of staff travel methods as a first step to establish a baseline for staff travel plans and to inform opportunities for promoting car share arrangements and season ticket loan requirements. The council also recently worked with Kent County Council's 'Activmob' on sustainable travel to and from work, with several members of staff pledging to explore alternative, more sustainable means of travel in their daily commute.

Recommendation 24:

The Council continue to offer a cycle to work scheme (or similar) and explore options for staff shower and changing facilities within the Civic Centre.

38. The council's cycle to work scheme will be maintained, and officers will examine the feasibility and practicalities of maintaining pool bicycles or e-bikes for staff travel within the working day.
39. The installation of staff showers and changing facilities within the Civic Centre is being considered as part of the ongoing accommodation review, however it should be reiterated that the council has secured a favourable rate for staff members to utilise the Stour Centre showers and changing facilities at a reduced annual membership rate.

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Recommendation 25:

The Council should pursue grant funding related to air quality improvement, sustainable transport and associated infrastructure where feasible, including working with partners to submit joint bids as appropriate.

40. The council has good working relationships with its partners and has strengthened these in recent years through mechanisms such as the District Deal and Ashford Strategic Delivery Board. As noted in regard to recommendation 2, the majority of government grant funding related to air quality is restricted to local authorities with declared air quality management areas or projected exceedances of pollutant concentration limits, however the identification of suitable projects and grant funding could be a function of the officer post detailed in recommendation 26.

Recommendation 26:

The Council consider the appointment of an officer to lead on Sustainability; research and apply for appropriate grant funding; and deliver on the aims of the Energy Efficiency Strategy and any actions adopted from this report for inclusion in the Air Quality Strategy.

41. The creation of a new post will be explored within the 2019/20 financial year to establish budgetary resource and feasibility, however it is felt that in addition to the areas highlighted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, other key areas which require particular focus include the Kent Environment Strategy, environmental permitting, transport modelling and driving behavioural change; as a consequence of which the postholder would need to hold a degree of specialist knowledge to effectively carry out such a role as well as drawing on support from across the authority.

42. If proven feasible and agreed, such a post may best be located within either the Community Safety and Wellbeing service (where the post would be co-located with and able to support the Environmental Protection team in terms of local air quality monitoring) or the Environment and Land Management Service (which leads on the council's approach to environmental strategy).

Recommendation 27:

The Council's website should include a page tailored toward air quality information which outlines the aims of the strategy as well as including potential air quality improvement actions, information on sustainable transport options and DAQI reports.

43. The council's website can be utilised to effectively drive behaviour change through raising public awareness of the impacts of air quality on health and driving a wider ownership of air pollution among the borough's residents. As part of a redesign of the council's web presentation of air quality information the items highlighted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be considered.

Recommendation 28:

The Council should work with KCC to use VMS in Ashford to promote air quality information for drivers.

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44. VMS signage is in place along several key routes through and around Ashford and is being used to promote measures such as car sharing which will impact positively on air quality. The council will liaise with Kent County Council over the use of these signs to co-ordinate PR campaigns around air quality.

Recommendation 29:

The Council should work with its partners through the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board to raise awareness of poor outdoor air quality and provide advice to high risk groups.

45. As discussed in regard to recommendation 17, there is a correlation between the priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the recommendations made in respect of air quality, particularly related to the uptake of cycling and walking as an alternative to use of the private car.

46. Raising public awareness of poor air quality and actions that can be taken to mitigate its impacts will be a key theme of the strategy in development as discussed in regard to recommendation 1. Co-ordinating with partners in public health will be key to the successful delivery of the strategy and its aims.

Conclusion

47. As evidenced in the report, work in respect of a number of recommendations made by the Task Group and Committee is underway which will serve to set conditions for improving air quality in the borough. The information provided by officers within this report will be used to shape the final air quality strategy and provide measurable actions to drive delivery of the strategy aims.

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