

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

04 April 2013

Report of the Air Quality Scrutiny Task Group

Purpose

1. To present the conclusions and recommendations of the Air Quality Joint Scrutiny Task Group for endorsement.

Background

2. The Environment Select Committee has held a longstanding interest in the development of the Council's Air Quality Strategy and considered drafts in the run up to its adoption in July 2010 and 2011 and November 2011. Wiltshire Council adopted its Air Quality Strategy in December 2011.
3. At its meeting on the 17 July 2012, it was agreed by the O&S Management Committee that air quality should be a part of its forward work programme as a legacy issue.
4. A report containing proposals as to how this could be achieved was presented at the meeting on 30 August 2012. This Task Group was established to undertake this work with the following terms of reference:
 - a) To review and scrutinise the implementation of the Air Quality strategic objectives and actions plan;
 - b) To scrutinise the effectiveness of Council Services working together holistically to ensure that respective service contributions are embedded within service delivery plans;
 - c) To jointly report to the Health and Environment Select Committees, from which membership of the Task Group has been sourced.

Methodology

5. Due to some difficulty establishing membership and resourcing issues the Task Group began its work in February 2013. It met formally on two occasions and comprised the following membership:

Cllr Alan Hill (Chairman)
Cllr Chris Cochrane
Cllr Rosemary Brown
Cllr David Jenkins
Cllr Bill Roberts
Cllr Nigel Carter

6. The intent of the Task Group was to scope the potential work to be done in order to provide background to any future task group established on the subject if accepted as a recommended legacy item by the new Council after May elections.
7. The Task Group met with Cllr Keith Humphries and Mandy Bradley, Head of Public Protection from Wiltshire Council as part of this scoping exercise.
8. The Task Group wish to express their gratitude to the witnesses who contributed their time to this initial work on the scrutiny review.

Air Quality in Wiltshire

9. Air Quality is covered in the Wiltshire Core Strategy by Core Policy 55, with the aim of:

“Wiltshire Council working collaboratively will seek to maintain the good air quality in the county and strive to deliver improvements in areas where air quality fails national objectives in order to protect public health and the environment.”

This Policy is supported by documentation such as the Air Quality Supplementary Planning Guidance which is currently subject to public consultation.

10. Work has commenced on reviewing existing Air Quality Action Plans, and developing a new format for the Wiltshire-wide Air Quality Action Plan with a stronger community focus. Various areas have formed their own community working groups with a focus on Air Quality, called Air Quality Alliances.
11. Air Quality Action Plans must be produced where AQMAs have been declared. The Plan must demonstrate that the Council is working towards meeting the air quality objectives. The Action Plan is submitted to DEFRA for approval. Once accepted the Council must provide annual progress reports on work undertaken to achieve the actions contained within the plan. We are currently reviewing action plans produced by the District Councils with the aim of producing one overall action plan for Wiltshire. The new AQMAs will be incorporated into this plan.

Under the Local Air Quality Management Regime, Wiltshire Council must carry out regular reviews and assessments of air quality in their area against standards and objectives prescribed in regulations and report them to DEFRA.

12. There is a Health and Environment Group established by Frances Chinemana of the Public Health Team. The group is composed of the Health Protection Agency, Public Health, Public Protection Services, Environment Agency and the Local Commissioning Board. This forum has been consulted on the Supplementary Planning Document for Air Quality.
13. Representatives from Public Protection and Public Health are meeting shortly with the Head of Spatial Planning with regard to Health Impact Assessments which may become a planning requirement, with implications for air quality and noise.
14. The monitoring equipment in Wiltshire is now over 10 years old and there is a need to consider its replacement as it comes towards the end of its operating life. The Task Group felt that an equipment management policy should be drawn up, assessing, inter alia: equipment performance trends, measurement sensitivity requirements and recent technology improvements.
15. The Task Group also received a report on school transport from Ruth Durrant.

Recommendations

16. That the Task Group was impressed by the progress made on implementing the new Air Quality Strategy, and recommends:
 - a. Scrutiny of it remains in the Forward Work Plan for the new Council's Overview and Scrutiny function, subject to any comment from the inspector.
 - b. Oversight of the monitoring regime and the equipment be undertaken to ensure it is fit for purpose
 - c. The Task Group believes that, whilst Wiltshire Council is not legally obliged to achieve national air quality objectives, we are required to work towards the objectives by drawing up action plans setting out the measures we intend to take in pursuit of them. It is incumbent upon us as a responsible Authority to attempt to reduce the exceedances to below recommended levels.
 - d. That Air Quality Alliances review all the Council, school and business travel plans in their area.

Proposal

17. The Committee is invited to endorse the recommendations of the Air Quality Task Group.
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Cllr Alan Hill – Chairman of the Air Quality Task Group

Report author: Teresa Goddard – Scrutiny Officer

01225 713548 teresa.goddard@wiltshire.gov.uk