

Wiltshire Council – Overview and Scrutiny

Report of the joint Air Quality Task Group

Background

- 1 The Environment Select Committee had held a longstanding interest in the development of the Council's Air Quality Strategy. It agreed that in order to deliver the aims of the strategy a more holistic involvement from council teams and the community was required and that the aims and objectives should be integrated into relevant service delivery plans.
- 2 A report containing proposals as to how this could be achieved was presented to the Committee in August 2012. However, it was acknowledged that it was impossible to separate the 'cause and effect' of poor air quality and the Committee suggested that a joint Task Group should be established with the Health Select Committee to consider the Action Plan and the realisation of the strategic objectives of the Air Quality Strategy. At its meeting in September 2012, the O & S Management Committee agreed to the formation of a joint Task Group as the topic fell within the remit of both Committees.

Terms of reference

- 3 The terms of reference were to:
 - Review and scrutinise the implementation of the Air Quality strategic objectives and action plan.
 - Scrutinise the effectiveness of Council Services working together holistically to ensure that respective service contributions are embedded within service delivery plans.
 - Jointly report to the Health and Environment Select Committees, from which membership of the Task Group has been sourced.

Membership

- 4 Pre May 2013
Cllr Alan Hill (chairman)
Cllr Rosemary Brown
Cllr Nigel Carter
Cllr Christopher Cochrane
Cllr David Jenkins
Cllr Bill Roberts
- 5 Post May 2013
Cllr Peter Evans (chairman)
Cllr Glenis Ansell
Cllr Rosemary Brown
Cllr David Jenkins
Cllr Jacqui Lay

Witnesses

- 6 Evidence was taken from the following:
- Cllr Keith Humphries, Cabinet member for Public Health, Protection Services, Adult Care and Housing;
 - Mandy Bradley, Service Director Public Protection;
 - Ariane Crampton, Head of Service, Account Management;
 - Gary Tomsett, Public Protection Manager;
 - Rachel Kent, Environmental Health Officer;
 - Allan Creedy, Head of Service, Sustainable Transport;
 - Ruth Durrant, School Travel Advisor.

Evidence

- 7 The following documentary evidence was provided:
- Air Quality Strategy for Wiltshire 2011 -15 (a high level guiding document to inform policy and direction across a range of council services with the aim to improve air quality);
 - Air Quality Strategic Action Plan (identifies links between existing strategies and suggests a series of time related actions that should be taken to advance work in this area);
 - Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document 2012
- 8 Local authorities have a duty to monitor air quality within their areas having regard to national air quality objectives and standards and report this information to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on an annual basis. There are seven pollutants which the Council is required to consider under European and UK law, these include lead, benzene and sulphur dioxide.
- 9 Air quality in Wiltshire is predominantly good with the majority of the county having clean unpolluted air. There are however a small number of locations where the combination of traffic, road layout and geography has resulted in exceedances of the annual average for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and fine particulates (PM₁₀). In such cases, local authorities have to designate an air quality management area (AQMA). In Wiltshire these are in Salisbury, Bradford on Avon, Devizes, Marlborough, Westbury, Calne.
- 10 It is acknowledged by Defra that local air quality is outside the control of local authorities; however, they are expected to show steps they are taking towards improvement.
- 11 A Health and Environment Group has been formed comprising the Health Protection Agency, the Environment Agency and the public health and public protection service, which was consulted on the Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document.

- 12 The Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document provides technical advice for developers, consultants and the Council in dealing with applications that may have an impact on air quality with a view to ensuring consistency. The intention is that it should support planning and air quality should not be seen as a way of restricting development. The document is currently being revised.
- 13 A number of planning policies advocated energy efficiency/low carbon with regard to the quality of build. The standards within them cannot be forced on builders; builders may want to demonstrate that a development would not be financially viable if the standards were adopted, at which point, they could negotiate with the Council over the delivery of the standards. The carbon reduction team was working on boosting the capability of the Council to counter such arguments.
- 14 The Council's own fleet contains three electric vehicles for the use of staff. The budget for them was provided on an 'invest to save' basis. There were electric charging stations at County Hall and Shurnhold.
- 15 With regard to threats to health from air pollution, the Council followed the advice provided by the national public health experts. The Defra website provided advice for those at risk from air pollution. The public health evidence base was growing in respect of the impact of poor air quality. It was suggested that 29,000 deaths may be due to particulate pollution but it was difficult to attribute them to it as many factors were involved (Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollution 2010).
- 16 The environment and transport sections of the Joint Strategic Assessment were currently being updated.
- 17 Most schools had travel plans although a number were out of date and some school had problems with funding. On the school census, it was no longer compulsory to record how students travelled to school. The Council had limited influence over schools and it was felt that a more local influence would be effective. An example of good practice was provided whereby the Calne Area Board had organised a successful Environment Event, highlighting aspects including air quality and encouraging the involvement of the local schools.
- 18 The primary source of air pollution was traffic. It was not always possible to identify the source of any pollution; it could be local or trans-boundary. Local authorities were not required to monitor very small particulates (PM_{2.5}); this was a government responsibility.
- 19 The Council currently had three particulate monitors, situated in Salisbury, Bradford on Avon and Devizes. The monitors were very expensive (approximately £45,000) and required a crane to move them. Due to their large size it could be difficult to find suitable locations for them. The Council also had a monitoring network of diffusion tubes which measure nitrogen dioxide levels in the atmosphere and were used as a screening tool. They were moved around the county as required.

- 20 Transport planning was a key factor in the assessment of future development. The Core Strategy favours growth options which reduced the need to travel. Transport modelling was undertaken on each new settlement; this enabled the current position to be compared to the new position and presented options to mitigate any problems arising. These would include reducing congestion and improving accessibility.
- 21 Service plans for sustainable transport were under review. They comprise 8 key elements and air quality is included as a key tenet. Travel Plans were incorporated into contracts awarded by the Council where appropriate, and were enforced if necessary.

Conclusions

- 22 The 17 actions identified in the action plan had a range of completion dates, with the latest due to be completed by the end of 2013. The Task Group was satisfied with the progress that had been made on the 3 outstanding actions to be completed by the end of 2013 (points 13, 16 and 17 in the action plan), although it was acknowledged that the action plan was an evolving document and new actions could arise from those in the existing plan.
- 23 The Task Group was reassured that key services across the Council (Public Protection, Development, Transport and the ECO team) were working together to ensure that respective service contributions were embedded within service delivery plans and that they were effective in supporting the improvement of air quality across Wiltshire.
- 24 It was encouraged that both environmental and climate change considerations and public health considerations were compulsory elements of any report being presented to Cabinet.
- 25 The Task Group acknowledged that the Council alone could not tackle poor air quality and that it also required other key agencies and the community to work together.

Recommendations

- 26 The Task Group recommends that:
- a) The 'template' created by the Calne Area Board to stage their Environment Event should be made available to other interested Area Boards.
 - b) A mechanism/process should be developed to allow Area Boards to share examples of good practice/templates for other successful activities;
 - c) Having completed its work, the Task Groups stands down.

Next steps

- 27 The Report of the joint Air Quality Task Group is presented to both the Environment and Health Select Committees for endorsement and forwarded to the Cabinet member for Area Boards and Cabinet member for Public Health, Protection services, Adult Care and Housing for comment.
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Cllr Peter Evans, chairman, joint Air Quality Task Group

Report author:

Maggie McDonald, Senior Scrutiny Officer
01225 713679
maggie.mcdonald@wiltshire.gov.uk

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